

**HOW CULTURE HAS INFLUENCED THE
INTERPRETATION OF HOLY BIBLE: THE WESTERN
AND AFRO-ASIAN SCENARIO**

by

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ABSTRACT

Culture marks a people's total way of life. It is the epitome for their convictions, beliefs, norms, and intellectual dispositions. In this regard, culture for many communities takes precedence thus replacing the Word of God. The study aimed to look at the different ways culture has contributed or suppressed proper interpretation of the Bible. The main investigation assessed the extent to which Western and Afro-Asian culture contributed positively to sound interpretation of the Word of God. Secondly, it evaluated the major cultural setbacks that impede cultures in the West, Africa and Asia to interpret the Bible appropriately. The objectives sought to understand how culture had contributed to the interpretation of the Bible as well as the establishment of the impact of Western and Afro-Asian cultures towards sound interpretation of the Bible. There are two factors that influence how people construe the Bible. These include the pre-understanding, presuppositions, and the laws of communication as well as apprehension. In addition, pre-understanding comprises anything and everything people apprehend, believe or assume prior to the study of the Bible. It is possible to have two people looking at the same passage of the Bible and yet come up with totally different interpretation. The reason for such a scenario has to do with the disparity in their pre-understanding and presuppositions. Jesus did wash his disciples' feet where in the contemporary times such does not have the same implication as it did in the disciples' culture. What communities are required to do, therefore, is take Jesus' teaching as an invitation to humility and self-sacrifice and put it into practice in accordance with the culture. Culture is the distinctiveness of a specific group of people that entails its religion, language, social habits, economic practices, political practices, values, beliefs, music, and art among many

other characteristics. It is from culture that people get to know whom they are by conforming to what the wider human society expects from them and their contribution to the welfare of the entire society.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study seeks to address the topic ‘How Culture has Contributed or Influenced the Interpretation of the Bible in the Western and Afro-Asian Scenario’. As the reader can see, the study would have been addressed from different perspectives. For instance, by looking at culture, it demonstrates the manner in which such would contribute or impact on the interpretation of the Bible. Secondly, there is an option to look at how different communities used their culture to interpret the Bible. In the same context, it would mean that the biblical scholars or evangelizers used culture of a given people at that time to interpret the Bible. Thus the study is based on this parameter to understand the impact of culture in understanding or interpreting Bible and faith related matters. This is because culture is a reality and so the churches cannot ignore it while at the same time they seek to spread the good news across the world. This is why the researcher also did succinct research on a few cultures especially in the West, Africa, and Asia.

The aim is not to understand the cultures as ends in themselves; but it is to pick out the main issues in the said cultures that would be relevant in showing how they may be used to enhance interpretation of the Bible or even impede the same. As mentioned earlier, the platform would be both backward looking and forward looking since the researcher wanted this to become an ecumenical policy document that may be used to address the global reality of culture and how the same may be used to improve or address the challenges encountered when doing biblical interpretation. It is worth stressing that this was not a cultural anthropological work since the review of cultures was mainly to understand different livelihoods and beliefs of a people and then use that to address the

main topic. This means the reader taking part in the study should not delight in the fact that he would get to understand the selected cultures; at least he will understand the main cultural issues that add value or impede interpretation of the Bible.

This dissertation has been sub-divided in six chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 provides a general introduction and background of the study including the research questions, objectives, problem/thesis statement, definition of key terms, significance of the study, and a conceptual framework.

Chapter 2 consists of the main literature review where issues to do with culture and interpretation of the Bible were addressed in depth. In development of the chapter the researcher noted on the main propositions from the research findings as well as the investigative framework; these are what guided the analysis and discussions.

Chapter 3 is meant to give a brief overview on the methodology of the study; it also demonstrated what the researcher did in terms of research approach to ensure the research outcomes were valid and reliable.

Chapter 4 articulates on the main cultural case studies and the sole aim being to pick the main practices and beliefs that either affected or would impact on the interpretation of the Bible.

Chapter 5 contains the main analysis and discussions based on the research findings. Just to reiterate the analysis focused on how cultures as they stand today would affect the interpretation of the Bible. This is why the researcher refers to the study as phenomenological because it focused on cultures as such through available secondary resources. Therefore, by doing a direct scrutiny of the cultures the researcher noted in the main issues that would affect interpretation of the Bible in the future.

Chapter 6 concludes the study and proposes recommendations.

The main question would be, 'how would cultural belief, whatever it is, be useful in understanding or interpreting the Bible today?'

This question really makes the study to be more forward looking than backward looking. In fact, as mentioned earlier, the researcher intended this piece of work to be as so because the ultimate aim is that evangelizers can use the ideas to communicate biblical truths. However, from time to time there will be analysis especially in the Western culture where the researcher indicated how it has been influential in the interpretation efforts of the Scripture. That said the reader is hereby presented with the overall outline of the work for purposes of good flow.

1.1 Background of the Study

It is worth noting that church planters should take the issue of worldviews very seriously since it contains some essential guidelines that can be useful both in the present and long-term scope for the evangelizers. In other words, worldviews presents to the church planters the necessary touch-points that they would use to transform the Christian lives of a given community or culture. It is therefore very important that the content of the gospel message be very independent from the missionaries' regional or cultural aspects in order to avoid arbitrary bias and prejudice. As can be seen, worldviews have got a greater potential to bring about such bias hence the reason why church planters need to understand them if they are to be successful in communicating the gospel.¹

¹ Van Sanders, The Role of Worldviews in Church Planting (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 3.

If church planters ignore the worldviews then they can be rest assured that their efforts to develop the new church may not succeed in the long-term. It is arguably so that gospel communicated in the context of the respondent's worldview motivates indigenous leadership and even enable them to develop firm Christian values and institutions.²

In most cases a spiritual leader is gauged in terms of his theological achievements or his ability to invoke metaphysical reality; however indigenous leaders gain validity by how they are measured by their congregation. As such, what counts is their ability to address the cultural values and expectations of the respondents. Indigenous leaders are expected to lead the congregation along their own thought and provide them with insights related to their daily lives.³

It is believed that separation of the gospel and culture is not an easy thing at all. Moreover, missionaries should be able to differentiate their worldviews from those of the evangelized, in this case the mission, if they are to succeed in understanding the cultural differences between them and the respondents.⁴ If it is argued that gospel message fails to address the daily needs of the people, then the argument can be replied that the message impacts on them only in a superficial way. It is therefore important for church planters to distinguish and at the same time integrate the gospel from the point of view of their culture and that of the respondent's culture. This is also because worldviews and culture have got similar implications to the evangelized. So, if the missionaries do not get rid of

² Van Sanders, The Role of Worldviews in Church Planting (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 3.

³ Marguerite G. Kraft, Worldview and the Communication of the Gospel: A Nigerian Case Study (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1978), p. 140.

⁴ Paul G. Hiebert, "An Introduction to Mission Anthropology," in Crucial Dimensions in World Evangelization (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1976), p. 58.

their cultural biases they may risk communicating their culture and not the gospel message.⁵

It is the case that the interpretation of the Word of God serves as a major issue today. Bearing in mind the importance of the Bible towards enhancement of Christian faith and growth of the Church, the Pontifical Biblical Commission has been entrusted with the duty of addressing all barriers. The other critical point is that the challenges attributed to the interpretation of the Bible are not merely a modern phenomenon. This is because the Bible by virtue of itself indicates that its interpretation is not an easy affair. Essentially, the problem of culture in relation to interpretation of the Bible is an old matter although it has been accentuated with time.⁶

In such a topic it is important for the reader to take into account some of the criterion or approaches towards interpretation of the Bible. This is because some of them derive from particular cultures. For instance, the canonical approach derived from the United States many years ago.⁷

1.2 Thesis Statement

Culture marks a people's total way of life. It is the epitome for their convictions, beliefs, norms, and intellectual dispositions. In this regard, culture for many communities takes precedence thus replacing the Word of God.

⁵ Paul G. Hiebert, "An Introduction to Mission Anthropology," in Crucial Dimensions in World Evangelization (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1976), p. 58.

⁶ Presented by the Pontifical Biblical Commission to Pope John Paul II on April 23, 1993, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," Available at <http://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/PBC_Interp-FullText.htm>.

⁷ Ibid.

1.3 Purpose of Study

The study aimed to look at the different ways culture has contributed or suppressed proper interpretation of the Bible. The case study focuses Western, Asian, and African cultures.

1.4 Research Questions

Question 1. To what extent has Western and Afro-Asian culture contributed positively to sound interpretation of the Word of God?

Question 2. What are the major cultural setbacks that impede cultures in the West and Afro-Asian region to interpret the Bible appropriately?

1.5 Research Objectives

1. To understand how culture has contributed to the interpretation of the Bible.
2. To establish the impact of Western and Afro-Asian cultures towards sound interpretation of the Bible.

1.6 Definition of Terms

The definition of terms is based on a “system-building approach”. By this, it means that the researcher gave definition to the terms in the manner in which he would have liked them be applied in the study. Therefore, the definition notes may not scientific in the sense in which they may not specifically be derived from books or other secondary resources.

Absolute Truth: The kind of truth that does not have bias or prejudice. This is truth that is clear and evident by its own right.

Biblical Interpretation: The ability of the individual to read the Word of God and understand the message and at the same time explain the essence of it to others.

Consciousness: The mental state of the person.

Cultural Beliefs: The ideologies and convictions that people derive from their own cultures.

Cultural Conflict: The crisis an individual encounters when his culture does not rhyme with the external reality or issues.

Cultural Fundamentalism: The inability of the individual to emancipate himself from his cultural beliefs or practices.

Cultural Internalization: The capacity of people to integrate cultural values with the external world.

Cultural Practices: The practical way of life of the people in light of their culture.

Cultural Values: Ideas/ideologies that has meaning to the people.

Dynamics of Culture: All issues or ideas that are about a culture.

Hermeneutics: The study of the Word of God in its very context.

Objectivity: Capacity to get rid of any kind of bias and prejudice and judge reality for what it is.

Thought-Content: The mental state of the person and the degree of knowledge he or she has.

1.7 Significance of the Study

Already the reader can see that the study did not go for the obvious investigation in light of the proposed topic of study. The ultimate aim is to understand the place of the Word of God in different cultures. This comes at the wake where cultural values, beliefs, and practices have replaced the Word of God. Thus, people have created other gods based on their culture. By the way by mentioning culture it does not merely refer to traditions or customs, but it extends to contemporary beliefs as well. Therefore, the analysis will not be limited to a given date or time of a given culture as the exploration seeks to look at the matter from a contemporary point of view. This is what makes the study one of its kinds because of the nature of investigation. The other benefit is that it will look into the matter in all spheres. That means it will not just be based on literal discussion of the proposed topic but also on the possible ecumenical issues this may pose; the current study may be used by different congregations so that they might enhance their approach to evangelization and re-evangelization efforts.

1.8 Conceptual Framework

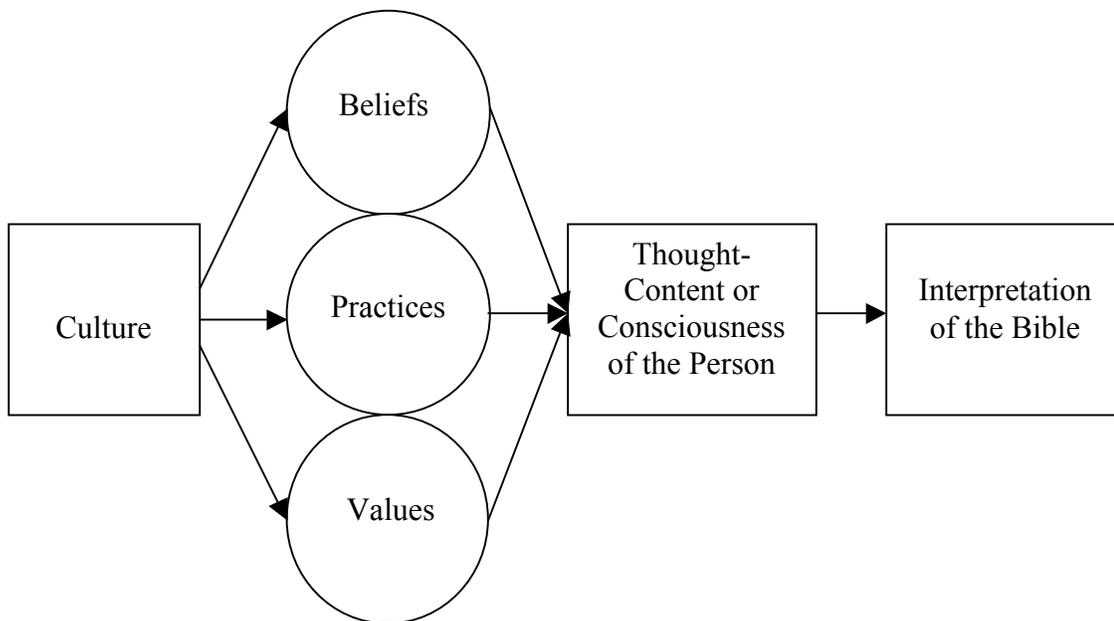
In the conceptual framework it is sought to understand the link between culture and interpretation of the Bible. The critical point is that culture becomes the thought-content of the subjects as so it translates to be the framework through which they perceive reality. For instance, it is the fact that if in a certain culture a person believes in many gods the likelihood would be that he would not appreciate a biblical verse that emphasizes on worship of only one God. There are also cultures that talk about the right to polygamy kind of life; therefore, it would be very difficult for the subject to take in

biblical verses that talk about monogamy. This is exactly the main discussion in this work, as in, looking at fundamental cultural values and then based on the same to show how they would interfere with appropriate interpretation of the Bible. Please note the use of the expression “appropriate interpretation of the Bible” which may mean the ability of the subject to put into practice the teachings prescribed in the Scripture. In fact, in this study the connotation of interpretation of the Bible does not mean the aspect of reading, for instance, the ability of the person to read the text as it is in terms of grammar but rather it means the potentiality to assimilate what is in the text and put into practice.

Consider the following case:

‘A’ from culture ‘X’ reads in the Bible that “God is the Supreme Being and He only should be worshipped”. Now, upon interpretation of the same this person is able to read out the text as it is. That is one aspect. The question, however would be, whether this person has really understood what the text means and does he also put it into practice? For instance, in faith and duty, has this person begun professing the reality of one God? Indeed, if the person comes from a culture where there is belief of many gods then he will have a lot of difficulty interpreting the text and putting it into practice. So, in this study the assessment focused more on the implications of culture and how the same might have led to the impossibility of the people of God to allow the teachings of the Scripture penetrate their thoughts and hearts. This is exactly what it meant when the researcher indicated that culture becomes the window through which cultural actors perceive the world and indeed the Word of God.

Figure 1.1: A Model to Demonstrate Implications of Culture and how it Impacts on Interpretation of the Bible
(Source: developed by Author)



The implications of culture and how it impacts on interpretation of the Bible are illustrated in figure 1.1. As can be seen, the model indicates that culture generates beliefs, practices, and values for the person. In turn, the three variables become his thought-content or consciousness. It is the two aspects that become the frame within which the same person conducts interpretation of the Bible. The reader will clearly see that there is a whole psychological process right from assimilation of culture to how the person interprets reality around him. By reality it means the entire environment of the person but for the purposes of this study such will be narrowed to “reality of interpretation of the Bible”; hope this does not confuse the reader. The above pattern that connects culture and the interpretation of Bible is valid for any region or time.

1.9 Summary of the Chapter

The first chapter played a great role in the study because it introduced the main arguments. In fact, reading the ideas presented in chapter one tells the reader what the rest of the chapters are all about. In addition, chapter one alone is sufficient to provide the reader with enough insights on the best answers to the research questions. However, there is need for more research in the matter hence other chapters were developed to furnish the reader with more knowledge on the subject of study. The problem statement was well developed which also represented the main thesis statement. On the other hand, the objectives of the study were stated including the significance and definition of key terms. Just here the reader was presented with the main conceptual framework that served as a platform for the later developments.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the main literature where issues to do with culture and addresses the interpretation of Bible in depth. Though the Bible is understood as the Word of God globally, the interpretation varies from culture to culture, region to region, church to church and so on.

2.1 How to Interpret the Bible Correctly

The entire section will look at some fundamental issues related to the correct interpretation of the Bible and all the dynamics. It should be remembered that the aim of the current research is to demonstrate the degree to which culture has impacted on interpretation of the Bible. Therefore, it is imperative to treat “Interpretation of the Bible” as a theme in itself by looking at the major concepts thereof. This is what will be achieved in this section.

2.1.1 Synopsis

There are two factors that influence how people construe the Bible. These include the pre-understanding, presuppositions, and the laws of communication as well as apprehension. In addition, pre-understanding comprises anything and everything people apprehend, believe or assume prior to the study of the Bible.⁸ Just like a pair of glasses, people perceive everything through their pre-understanding, although this may not serve

⁸ Thomas A. Howe, “How to Interpret your Bible Correctly (Part 2),” Available at <<http://www.equip.org/articles/how-to-interpret-your-bible-correctly-part-2/>>.

as an impediment to objective judgment. The universal visible feature of how people understand biblical truths renders objectivity possible, at least in principle. Owing to these universal aspects that biblical authors share, proper interpretation would be possible. However, any society needs to be conscious of their pre-understandings to protect against improper interpretation. There is also the need to present the pre-understanding to biblical truth to allow God's word rectify any misconceptions that are bizarre to a given people. Two principles of communication that guide the way everyone communicate are "the universal nature of truth" and "the unity of humanity nature". The fact that truth is objective and the principles of logic are unavoidable, then this "truth" would be universal. Additionally, the fact that humanity is one race with a common kind of mind implies that it is possible to appreciate universal truths inscribed in biblical times, despite the fact that the cultural expression of those truths may differ.⁹

The propositions in this context are that the society to be conscious of their pre-understandings to safeguard against improper interpretation of the Bible and people shall not perceive everything through their pre-understanding

2.1.2 The Pre-understanding and Presuppositions of the Interpreter

Does pre-understanding enhances or impedes objectivity? Everyone relates to the Scripture in light of his pre-understanding. It is possible to have two people looking at the same passage of the Bible and yet come up with totally different interpretation. The reason for such a scenario has to do with the disparity in their pre-understanding and

⁹ Thomas A. Howe, "How to Interpret your Bible Correctly (Part 2)," Available at <<http://www.equip.org/articles/how-to-interpret-your-bible-correctly-part-2/>>.

presuppositions. The two terms “pre-understanding” and “presuppositions” refer to the way of looking at things, the background, the point of view, and also the assumption of the reader.¹⁰ A truism has come up among the writers and those who theorize about hermeneutics. This truism maintains, “Everyone comes to the Scripture with his or her own pre-understanding”.¹¹ At first glance, it undoubtedly seems true that everyone has his or her own perspectives. Some come as Christians, others as atheists, others from various cultures and since there are disparities in cultures, people most often differ about what they contemplate as significant and how they understand the reality of life. The way people perceive the world together with the values and preferences helps in developing a person’s way of looking at things. This kind of perspective has been referred as “worldview” where it is simply the way a person look at the world.¹²

2.1.2.1 Pre-understanding and Perspective

What is the link between pre-understanding and culture? When it comes to giving an interpretation, a person’s perspective is in most times referred to as his or her “pre-understanding”. Pre-understanding is anything and everything that people understand prior to the study of the Scripture.¹³ For example, in the system of American education, people attend lessons to do with science, art, math, language, and other topics. Due to this, majority of Americans have a basic concept of how the world works. These concepts

¹⁰ Thomas A. Howe, “How to Interpret your Bible Correctly (Part 2),” Available at <<http://www.equip.org/articles/how-to-interpret-your-bible-correctly-part-2/>>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

are part of the pre-understanding they generate when they study the Bible. Also, most American grownups have acquired certain set of values from their parents and therefore have fundamental understanding of right and wrong where such forms a segment of their understanding.¹⁴

Nevertheless, people from different cultural set up may not have similar appreciation of the world as it is or may not embrace the same values as others. Interpretation of the Bible may be affected by some aspects of a community's understanding that may be different from another community.¹⁵

Analogically a person's understanding can be compared to a pair of glasses. Take, for instance, a case of a man who can only see with the help of special pair of glasses. Therefore, the man sees everything through these glasses, without which he can see nothing. If these glasses were tainted so that everything appeared to bear red color, this man would regard all reality as being reddish. In general the man would assert that reality is red even if others try to convince him otherwise.

Everything that one thinks about, learns about, or reads about is filtered through a person's pre-understanding. Indeed, the pre-understanding involves all that one believes, knows, feels, and assumes to be true. It involves a person's education, training, disposition, language, culture, history and whatever else that make him what he is. When pre-understanding is viewed in relation to claims about what is true or false, mostly the term "presuppositions" is used. Presuppositions are particular things people assume to be

¹⁴ Thomas A. Howe, "How to Interpret your Bible Correctly (Part 2)," Available at <<http://www.equip.org/articles/how-to-interpret-your-bible-correctly-part-2/>>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

true and form the foundation of other beliefs. Moreover, pre-understanding is therefore a combination of all these beliefs and other aspects aforementioned.¹⁶

2.1.2.2 Pre-understanding and Objectivity

Often, it becomes difficult to determine what type of interpretation can be trusted. Most communities or individuals have to reach a conclusion owing to relativity derived from worldview or pre-understanding that inhibits anyone from having an objective view. The term “objective” usually means lack of bias or particular perspective that would affect how a person understands something. This view that someone can be completely objective or neutral has of late been characterized as “the view from nowhere”.¹⁷ It is pretty clear that no one can have a view from the blues because every person comes from a given environment. Owing to this fact that everyone views the world from a particular perspective, and then possibility for a neutral or completely objective position would never be achieved. At a glance this appears to be correct, however, there are other risks or defects with such reasoning. For instance, consider the following arguments:

1. When someone purports that not even a single person can be objective, he or she is in real sense assuming his or her claim is true for everyone.
2. However, a claim that is true for everyone is indeed an objective claim.
3. What such a person is actually saying is: “It is objectively true that hardly one can be objective”

¹⁶ Thomas A. Howe, “How to Interpret your Bible Correctly (Part 2),” Available at <<http://www.equip.org/articles/how-to-interpret-your-bible-correctly-part-2/>>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

The above argument appears correct, but there is a serious defect in this reasoning. When one claims that it is objectively true that “no one can be objective” the statement would be self-contradictory, hence false. On the contrary, if it were true that no one can be totally objective then objectivity would be said to be next to impossible; such a person is basically making an assumption that his or her claims are true for everyone. An objective claim is the one that is true for everyone. Objectivity is not only possible but it is inevitable as well. Even those who criticize objectivity feel that, as a reader, one can objectively comprehend the objection to objectivity.¹⁸

2.1.2.3 Objectivity and Perspectives

Perspectives are distinct to individuals or people who embrace a particular culture or use a particular language. For instance, tastes and customs are part and parcel of people’s pre-understanding but would not be the same in every culture. Other visible features of the pre-understanding, nonetheless, are applicable for everyone at all times and in all cultures.¹⁹

In the literature on pre-understanding and presuppositions, everyone contends that an interpreter approaches the Bible with his or her own perspective. In fact, everyone maintains that to claim that one can approach the Bible without personalized pre-understanding is self-defeating. If one claims to approach the Bible objectively, then this too becomes part of one’s pre-understanding.²⁰ If all people can get into similar

¹⁸ Thomas A. Howe, “How to Interpret your Bible Correctly (Part 2),” Available at <<http://www.equip.org/articles/how-to-interpret-your-bible-correctly-part-2/>>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

conclusion and claim that this conclusion is true for everyone, then there must be something concerning the pre-understanding of all these people that is common.

Pre-understanding of a person has a deep impact on his or her interpretation of the Bible. Atheists, for instance, approach the Bible with the pre-understanding that God of the Holy Scripture does not actually exist and therefore when they read about the miracles of Jesus, they must interpret them as mere myth or folklore, or as the amplification of excited disciples who want to advance their religious agenda. Owing to the fact that atheists strongly believe there is no God, they can never interpret these passages as literally true.²¹

It is imperative to become conscious of one's own pre-understanding so as to guard against wrong interpretation. The loyal students of God's word should be able to confess what they are convinced about God - who He is, what His nature is, and what His attributes are. For instance, does one believe God is omnipresent (present everywhere)? Does one believe God is omniscient (all knowing)? Does one believe God is omnipotent (all powerful)? Does one believe He is Holy, righteous, and loving? All of these beliefs have influence on the way a person interprets the Holy Scripture and one is supposed to state them candidly as part of his pre-understanding.²²

2.2 The Universal Principles of Communication and Understanding

Let us examine to what extent does culture annihilate the possibility for absolute truth when interpreting biblical truths. There are certain values that rule the way people

²¹ Thomas A. Howe, "How to Interpret your Bible Correctly (Part 2)," Available at <<http://www.equip.org/articles/how-to-interpret-your-bible-correctly-part-2/>>.

²² Ibid.

communicate. Some of them are universal meaning they are common to all people at all times irrespective of their language, ethnic background, culture, or perspectives. By appreciating these values, one can study the Bible at the same time acknowledging the possibility to find out the proper meaning of the text.

The reality of absolute truth makes it possible to study the Bible and discover absolute truth. The fact that truth is absolute and that the law of non-contradiction is indisputable shows that truth is universal.²³

The main assertion is that human nature is common to everyone regardless of the reality of cultural multiplicity. It is evident that the Bible was authored in certain periods of history and historical situations including cultural context quite dissimilar from the present.²⁴ The principles of the unanimity of human nature and the universality of truth, however, show that there was not a “Hebrew” mind or a “Greek” mind or an “ancient” mind; therefore, truth among those cultures at a certain time frame was in some way dissimilar than truth today.²⁵ Humanity is a single race with one kind of thinking and consequently the truth of the relation between God and humans is common to all today just like for the men and women of the Bible.²⁶ The dissimilarities, then, between those

²³ Thomas A. Howe, “How to Interpret your Bible Correctly (Part 2),” Available at <<http://www.equip.org/articles/how-to-interpret-your-bible-correctly-part-2/>>.

²⁴ Renita J. Weems, “Re-Reading for Liberation: African American Women and the Bible,” in Feminist Interpretation of the Bible and the Hermeneutics of Liberation (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), p. 21.

²⁵ Thomas A. Howe, “How to Interpret your Bible Correctly (Part 2),” Available at <<http://www.equip.org/articles/how-to-interpret-your-bible-correctly-part-2/>>.

²⁶ Ibid.

ancient cultures and modern ones are not in the nature of humanity or of truth, but to a certain extent in the social and cultural expressions of the same truths.²⁷

Does culture promote unity of human nature? Jesus did wash his disciples' feet wherein the contemporary times such does not have the same implication as it did in the disciple's culture. What communities are required to do, therefore, is take Jesus' teaching as an invitation to humility and self-sacrifice and put it into practice in accordance with the culture.

2.3 Further Evaluation: Biblical Interpretations

How does culture support hermeneutics? The issue about interpretation of the Bible did not appear recently; it is a phenomenon that has been there since the Bible was in common use. The interpretation of the Bible is in this case, quite an old problem, but it has accentuated with the passage of time. The following are the principles of biblical interpretation:²⁸

1. Who was the writer of the text?
2. Who are the recipients?
3. What are the meanings of the words used?
4. What were the cultural and historical situations?
5. What was the original idea of the writer?
6. How can the message be interpreted in the contemporary world?

²⁷ Thomas A. Howe, "How to Interpret your Bible Correctly (Part 2)," Available at <<http://www.equip.org/articles/how-to-interpret-your-bible-correctly-part-2/>>.

²⁸ Herbert W. Basser, "What Makes Exegesis Either Christian or Jewish," in The Reception and Interpretation of the Bible in Late Antiquity: Proceedings of the Montréal Colloquium in Honour of Charles Kannengiesser, 11-13 October 2006 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), p. 41.

The following are the general rules of biblical interpretation:²⁹

1. Original Interpretation - This refers to the fact that the author of the Bible has meaning attached to it; therefore, when doing interpretation this original meaning of the author remains fundamental. This should be a guiding point to whoever strives to interpret the Bible.
2. Application - In every passage, there exists single interpretations that may be applied in one or many ways.
3. Regard for Genre - For proper interpretations, the Bible consists of the following genres where each has its significance in proper interpretations; for instance, poems, wisdoms, narrations, gospel, polemic, legal, prophetic or logical disclosure.
4. Regard for Literary Devices - In order to understand the meaning of the passage; it is necessary to analyze its metaphor, simile and hyperbole.

Looking at the analysis above the main issue the researcher will bring into mind is the extent to which culture affects the general rules of biblical interpretation. At this point this will not be analyzed but then it will be reviewed in due course of the study.

2.3.1 Rules Specific to Interpretation of the Bible

1. Divine intervention - The interpretation of the Bible can be viewed from the fact of accommodation of Divine truths to human thinking, God who is infinite, having a word with the human who is finite.

²⁹ Letty M. Russel, Feminist Interpretation of the Bible (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1985), p. 12.

2. Harmony - The interpretation of the Bible cannot be done in such a way that one part contradicts the other.
3. Role of the Holy Spirit - The common belief is that when interpreting Holy Scriptures there must be intervention of the Holy Spirit. The function of the Holy Spirit is to give unique abilities in order to interpret the Bible accurately.
4. Jesus and the Interpretation of the Bible - Jesus condemned the Pharisees and the Scribes when they tried to replace the original text of the Scriptures with their traditions.

2.4 Key Themes in the Bible

This section will seek to present some of the key themes in the Bible just to present an awareness of issues therein that contradict with some cultural values and ideologies. In this regard, the analysis will present the themes in a brief manner and later revisit the same by showing how culture may and/or has interfered with their interpretation.

Eventually, the Bible is an immense book that contains numerous themes and lessons to instruct the people. There is no single lesson or theme that has a special point in the Bible without other parts.

2.4.1 The Problem of Evil

How does culture relate to the conception of evil in the Bible? The Old Testament poses and tries to respond to the question of how God can be good and invincible and still allow evil to be in the world. Since the time of the first parent's defiant act in the Garden

of Eden, the Bible presents man as subject to sin hence being different from God. The beginning chapters of Genesis portray God as aggrieved by man's evilness, signifying that the human, and not God, are liable for human wickedness (Gen. 6:6).³⁰ Subsequent books, like Judges and Kings illustrate continual efforts of God to influence the Israelites from the consequence of their wickedness. These narrations accentuate the human's aptitude to decline God's assistance, meaning that the liability for wickedness is on humankind. Judges resonate with the warning expression, "Once again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and because they did this evil the LORD gave Eglon king of Moab power over Israel" (Judg. 3:12).³¹

The most worrying difficult to God's righteousness, nonetheless, is the subsistence of natural evil, which is the unwarranted annihilation and suffering humankind mostly endure.³² God constantly advises the Israelites to demolish all cities killing everyone in the process. There are straightforward questions in the Book of Job about God's involvement in natural wickedness. God chastises Job severely to just attest to devil that Job is devotedly faithful.³³

2.4.2 The Possibility of Redemption

It is an important point to note, how culture would address the issue of redemption in the Bible. God characteristically reacts to human conduct with justice of

³⁰ Gabriel Gamen, Understanding the Message of the Bible (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 33.

³¹ Ibid, p. 37.

³² Ibid, p. 42.

³³ Ibid, p. 45.

reprisal, implying that humankind gets what they warrant. God chastises and blesses the wicked and upright respectively. The subject of compassion and redemption, which expand all over the scriptural narratives, goes against this standard of reprisal.³⁴ A further type of redemption entails the involvement of a third party as an arbitrator to suppress the fury of God with the offender. In Exodus chapter 32, we see that Moses' frenetic plea at Mount Sinai often makes God to "change His mind" and stop intended destruction to the Israelites. In the Book of Judges, chapter 16 explains how Samson gave up his life to buy back Israelites from the Philistine subjugation occasioned by Israelite's persistent wickedness.³⁵

2.4.3 The Virtue of Faith

Another question asked is, how has culture contributed to enhancement of faith in the Bible? In the Old Testament, faith is a flexible belief in the only true God and steadfast submission to his will. The forms of biblical faith are not those who are backed up by prearranged beliefs but those who opt to have confidence in God during the most trying moments. A component of the virtue of authentic faith is the capacity to believe in an invisible God. The Israelites handed over their total lack of faith when they protested after God who constantly manifested himself and performed miracles in their mass departure from Egypt.³⁶ Noah, Abraham, and Elijah stand for the three chief champions of faith in the Old Testament. Each exhibits his faith in God by undertaking ostensibly

³⁴ W. Eugene March, Great Themes of the Bible-Volume 1 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), p. 88.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 91.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 93.

illogical duty after God has been away from humanity for a considerable period of time.³⁷ Likewise, Abraham overlooked the idols and gods of his country in support of a conviction that an invisible and anonymous divinity would supply a land he pledged to his offspring.³⁸

2.4.4 The Covenant

Now we look into the point, how culture looks at covenant issues in Bible. The Almighty God made a covenant with Abraham making him the father of many nations. God also changed his name from Abram to Abraham, which means ‘father of many’ (Gen. 17:4-7).³⁹ The contract of God with humanity includes both his pledge to give Abraham and his generations a promised land and the religious ordinances given to the Israelites. The biblical covenant stands not only for a contractual accord but also for a zealous and turbulent association between God and humankind.⁴⁰ The agreement is a uniting structure that permits human nature to assess their lives as a sequence of figurative experiences. Initially, the symbols of the covenant are material and peripheral; God associated with Abraham by authorizing him to conduct the rite of circumcision and to sacrifice his son, Isaac. In Exodus, God portrayed his dedication to the Israelites when he miraculously separated the waters of the Red Sea and appeared in a pillar of fire.⁴¹

³⁷ W. Eugene March, Great Themes of the Bible-Volume 1 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), p. 94.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 96.

³⁹ Bible, New International Version (NIV): p. 11.

⁴⁰ W. Eugene March, Great Themes of the Bible-Volume 1 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), p. 98.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 99.

2.4.5 Doubles and Opposites

Does culture has any reaction to issues related to doubles and opposites in the Bible? Has culture derived any relevance from the understanding of opposites in the Bible? In the beginning, Genesis says, God made the universe by separating it into a classification of doubles, the sun and the moon, light and dark, the land and the sea, male and female. Therefore, the authors of the Old Testament portray the universe as a conglomeration of two fundamental contrasting powers. These powers comprise positive and negative, good and bad, lesser and greater aspects. The statutes in Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy draw a standard of being ritually clean or unclean, and for preferring obedience to disobedience.⁴² Like twins with contrasting personality, Jacob and Esau stood for perfect character doubles.⁴³

2.4.6 Salvation for Social Outcasts

How would culture rhyme with the position of the Bible or how it depicts Jesus in relation with sinners? Some researchers have contended that the New Testament's reference to sinners as the minority, deprived, rejected, destitute, and sickly. Jesus not only promised deliverance to such offenders, but also referred to the same as "blessed" in the entire gospels.⁴⁴ In many incidents in his work, Jesus upset typical Jews when he interacted with, preached to, and restored health to people considered outcast, deprived and ailed. Some contended that a famous theme in the Gospel was Jesus' spreading good

⁴² Gabriel Gamen, Understanding the Message of the Bible (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 45.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 48.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 51.

news to such people and requesting the wealthy class in the society to unite with poor.⁴⁵

Jesus states that he had not come to call righteous, but the sinners (Lk. 5:32).⁴⁶

2.4.7 Salvation through Faith in Christ

How would culture and customary practices compare to description of law in the Bible? In his epistle to the Church of Rome, Paul summed up his constant question regarding the connection between Jewish statute, which calls for some celebration and deeds, and faith in the grace given by God through Jesus Christ.⁴⁷ Paul maintained that the law served as a reward from God, and could aid humanity in being more truthful.

2.4.8 The Kingdom of Heaven

Is there any particular connotation of culture towards “Kingdom of Heaven”? The greatest part of Matthew’s Gospel is Jesus’ “proclamation” (Mt. 4:17-16:20),⁴⁸ in which He offered a number of affirmations concerning the kingdom of heaven. He compared kingdom of God to a tiny mustard seed, which has in it the capacity to develop into a “tree so that the birds of the air could come and make nests in its branches”. The declarations of Matthew regarding God’s kingdom of heaven represented the exciting fruits given by the life lived by a person in the earth in accordance with the directives of Christ.

⁴⁵ Gabriel Gamen, Understanding the Message of the Bible (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 55.

⁴⁶ Bible, New International Version (NIV): p. 766.

⁴⁷ Gabriel Gamen, Understanding the Message of the Bible (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 58.

⁴⁸ Bible, New International Version (NIV): p. 719-730.

2.4.9 The Good Samaritan

In what ways have different cultures integrated the spirit of good neighborhood? In light of the most famous allegory in the New Testament, Luke informs the audience that Jesus used this parable as a response to a question on who would be regarded as a “neighbor”.⁴⁹ This paper will not go into details regarding the matter but the greatest concern is the degree to which Jesus explained the true aspects of good neighborhood.

2.4.10 Spiritual Warfare

How do cultures perceive the evil one and is there hope that individuals can overcome such spirits? Satan has been depicted as God’s foe, persistently attempts to disrupt Christians from a good/holy course using harassment, hostility, separation, temptation, allegation, and dishonesty. God did arm every individual to not only shield himself, but also to “storm the gates of hell” and liberate its captives.⁵⁰

2.4.11 Return of Jesus Christ, Final Judgment and Future Hope

What is the basic understanding of the end of times depicted in the Bible from different cultural viewpoints? Human beings persistently fight with evil; the New Testament refers to eschatological perfection where it is stated that Jesus will come back and end all sufferings and wickedness. All will be recompensed for their efforts and work

⁴⁹ Gabriel Gamen, Understanding the Message of the Bible (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 61.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 63.

as well as enjoy full redemption. In the New Testament, readers are constantly made aware of the actuality of hell that really refers to perpetual disconnection from God.⁵¹

2.5 Analysis of Culture

Needless to say the analysis of culture as a theme is inevitable in the current study. This is because it is required to explore its underlying scientific issues as well as how other anthropologists have looked at it per se. This in turn will make the study deeply comprehensive because apart from showing how culture interferes with the interpretation of the Bible, it will also define culture from a phenomenological point of view. This is the relevance of this section. At the same time, the key issues also will be focused within culture that will be used to address the main objectives of the study.

2.5.1 Culture

The word culture has a variety of meanings. First it can refer to an acknowledgement of good literature, music, art, and food.⁵² For a biologist it is bound to be a colony of bacteria or other microorganisms developing in nutrient medium in a laboratory. However, for anthropologists and behavioral scientists, culture is the collection of learned human behavior patterns. The word was for the very first time used by the pioneer English anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor in his book, ‘Primitive Culture’ in 1871. He said that culture is “that complex whole which includes knowledge,

⁵¹ Gabriel Gamen, Understanding the Message of the Bible (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 65.

⁵² Joseph Lutz, “Understanding of Culture,” *Cultural Review Journal*, 5, No. 8 (August 2010), p. 15.

belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of the society.”⁵³

Culture is a strong human agent for survival though a changeable phenomenon. It is ever changing and corruptible due to its intangible nature and that it exists only in the mind. For instance, written languages, government, building and other artificial things are only the results of culture. They are not culture in themselves. It is for this reason that an archaeologist cannot in their excavations explore the absolute truths about culture. The artifacts of ancient people they excavate merely serve as material remains that show cultural patterns.⁵⁴

2.5.2 Levels of Culture

There are three levels of cultures that are part of learned behavior pattern and acumen. The most apparent one is the body of cultural traditions that differentiate specific society. For example, when people talk of Japanese or Spanish culture, they are referring to common language, traditions, and beliefs that put each of these people away from others. Often, those with common culture do so simply because they receive it as they were being brought up by parents and other members who share the same values.⁵⁵

Subculture is the second level of culture that is likely to be part of one’s identity. Different societies in which people have come from most of times keep much of their primitive cultural traditions. Consequently, they are bound to be part and parcel of an

⁵³ Joseph Lutz, “Understanding of Culture,” *Cultural Review Journal*, 5, No. 8 (August 2010), p. 17.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 18.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 21.

identified subculture in their new set up. The common cultural behavior of subcultures put them away from the rest of their society. An example of an easily recognizable subculture refers to USA that comprises ethnic groups such as African Americans and Mexican Americans. Each member of these subcultures has a common identity, food tradition, dialect and other cultural behaviors that emanate from their shared ancestral experience and background. In addition, when the cultural disparities between members of a subculture and the superior culture become unclear and ultimately fade, the subculture also dies out.

The third level is made up culture universals. These are acquired traits pattern that are common in all humanity. This is regardless of where people live in the whole world and they serve as traits found in all human races. For instance such human culture traits consist of:⁵⁶

- Use of age and sex to categorize people e.g. man, woman, teenager, adult
- Bringing up children in some kind of family setting
- Possess an idea of privacy
- Having rules to control sexual behaviors
- Having art
- Making jokes and playing games

Whilst all cultures have the above and may be many other universal behaviors, different cultural backgrounds have come up with their own ways of expressing themselves. For example, people in deaf subcultures most of the times use their hands to

⁵⁶ Joseph Lutz, "Understanding of Culture," Cultural Review Journal, 5, No. 8 (August 2010), p. 27.

communicate using sign language in place of verbal language and just as sign languages have grammatical rules so does the verbal one.⁵⁷

2.5.3 Culture and Society

Culture and society are distinct phenomenon. The former is made up of acquired and learned trait patterns and understandings while the latter is a group of organism that interacts. Societies are not only formed by people but schools of fish, flocks of birds and hives of bees also form societies. However, in the realm of human, societies are groups of people who indirectly or directly mix with each other. Additionally, people in human societies also understand that their social unit is unique from other societies in terms of common traditions and anticipations.

As mentioned earlier societies and cultures are different things, however, they are inseparably connected since culture is created and sent to others in the society. Cultures can hardly be produced by lone people. They are in fact the endless evolving result of people interacting with each other. Cultural pattern like language and politics cannot be of any importance except in terms of interaction of people.⁵⁸

2.6 The Seven Elements of Culture

2.6.1 Social Organization

How does social organization help communities to interpret the Bible? It forms social makeup by classifying its affiliates into small divisions to handle their basic

⁵⁷ Joseph Lutz, "Understanding of Culture," *Cultural Review Journal*, 5, No. 8 (August 2010), p. 29.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 30.

requirements. There is a pattern whereby the family is the most vital unit. In the family, children are educated on how to behave and on what to believe in the society. Types of families include nuclear family composed of husband, wife, and children. On the other hand, extended family comprises of grandparents, cousins, uncles and aunts, where a number of generations reside in one household. In such units there is strong reverence for elders and the elders are keen in taking care of the young ones. Also, there exist social classes, for instance, rank of individuals according to their status depending on what is vital to their culture.

2.6.2 Customs and Traditions

Customs and traditions also influence interpretation of the Bible. There are rules of behaviors or enforced concepts of what is right and wrong. They can be written laws, practices, or conventions.⁵⁹ These are elements that control the common man in interpreting the Bible.

2.6.3 Religion

Religion is instrumental towards interpretation of the Bible. Religion is a response to essential problems about the sense of life. It supports values which groups of individuals view as crucial. However, religion can cause conflict between different cultures. The word monotheism means belief in one God; the word polytheism stands for belief in many gods whereas atheism is lack of belief in God.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Jim Smith, Aspects of Culture (London: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 22.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 25.

2.6.4 Language

Language serves as the heart of culture. Every culture has a verbal language whether in a developed form or not. It is worthy to highlight that people who verbalize an identical language normally enjoy the same culture because through the language, traditional practices are passed from one generation to the other. Many societies are composed of big number of individuals who speak various languages. Moreover, each idiom can have a number of different dialects.⁶¹

2.6.5 Arts and Literature

To what degree does art and literature contribute or impede interpretation of the Bible? Arts and literature are fruits of the human thoughts. Through them the culture's fundamental beliefs can be passed from one generation to another, for instance, drawings, music, artifacts, folk tales just to mention a few.

2.6.6 Forms of Government

A government serves as a group of individuals who hold authority in a society; besides they are laws and political associations of a given society. Governments are formed to ensure that there is order and security, from external threats in the society. Forms of government may include the following. Democratic government is a government of the people and for the people where the masses enjoy supreme power and where conscience among its affiliates is very vital. In this system of government, the

⁶¹ Jim Smith, Aspects of Culture (London: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 28.

people elect leaders to represent them while the dictatorship government is where the ruler holds authority by force and in most cases through the support of the military.

2.6.7 Economic System

Economic system determines the use of resources to satiate the needs of the people. It is a determiner of what, how and for whom to produce. There are different kinds of economy namely,⁶² traditional economy where the production is for survival; market economy where there is selling and buying of goods and services; command economy where the government determines what or how goods are produced and their cost while the people enjoy little economic control; and mixed economy where some economic decisions are made by people whereas the government formulates others.

2.7 Cultures and Biblical Interpretation

In this section the researcher seeks to assess the relationship between culture and biblical interpretation. This actually is the central issue in the study; therefore, the discussions in this section will be critical.

2.7.1 Influence of Culture on Interpretation of the Bible

Culture may be an impediment to effective interpretation of the Bible. In light of the concepts mentioned above, let us examine how cultural relativism would impact on the interpretation of the Bible. Culture is the distinctiveness of a specific group of people that entails its religion, language, social habits, economic practices, political practices,

⁶² Jim Smith, *Aspects of Culture* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 33.

values, beliefs, music, and art among many other characteristics. It is from culture that people get to know whom they are by conforming to what the wider human society expects from them and their contribution to the welfare of the entire society.⁶³ In other words, culture manifests itself in the institutions, for instance, family, religious groups, work and government et cetera.⁶⁴ On the same issue, some rules and regulations are for controlling the behavior of the people to the extent that one act would be termed as ethical while the other as immoral in respect to one's cultural background. Therefore, each community will have its code of conduct and interpretation of certain aspects.⁶⁵

One distinguishing aspect of culture is that it is dynamic and for this case it significantly influences the progress of man throughout his history. One vital characteristic of culture is religion. Man by nature is a spiritual being and for this case, the perplexity of his existence in this world. Therefore, he appeals for an Infinite Being who moves his day-to-day activities. In this regard, there is always a belief in a Super Being and this practice is expressed in divine and devotional practices that govern the behavior of human acts.⁶⁶

God reveals himself through the human history and in the social setup. According to Christians, God communicates to his people through his word – the Holy Scripture written by some individuals by the inspiration of Holy Spirit. This word reached the world from one generation to the next through the culture of the people. God revealed

⁶³ Israel Knohl, "Cain: Son of God or Son of Satan?" in Jewish Biblical Interpretation and Cultural Exchange: Comparative Exegesis in Context (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p. 45.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 48.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 51.

⁶⁶ Dictionary.com, "Religion," Available at <<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/religion>>.

himself to his people Israel in a certain cultural setup and without doubt the interpretation of the Holy Bible in the modern world should be from the current context. Every culture is distinct from the other and of course it affects the interpretation of Scripture.⁶⁷

There is a strong relationship between culture and religion. In other words, they are two inseparable entities that influence each other respectively and especially when it refers to the interpretation of the Holy Scripture. Christianity as a religion is diverse from one epoch to the other and from a particular culture to the other. Without doubt, Christianity practiced today is remarkably distinct from the ancient conception and all along in the human history. Of course, there are various changes that are part of the dynamic culture and they considerably affect humanity as well as the interpretation of the Word of God.⁶⁸ Certainly there exists a time gap, a space gap, and a culture gap between the current world and of the biblical authors.⁶⁹ The task is to harmonize these gaps in order to understand the message transmitted by the authors in today's context.⁷⁰ Culture may be an impediment to the effective interpretation of the Bible. Definitely, the perspective one has of his culture significantly affects his interpretation of the Bible because culture exists in between the reader and the author of the text.⁷¹ For this reason, it is worth to interpret the Bible according to the prevailing circumstances or in the very

⁶⁷ Mark G. Brett, *Ethnicity and the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), p. 21.

⁶⁸ William J. Larkin Jr, *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics: Interpreting and Applying the Authoritative Word in a Relativistic Age* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2003), p. 44.

⁶⁹ Ferdinand E. Deist, *The Material Culture of the Bible: An Introduction* (London: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd, 2002), p. 54.

⁷⁰ Steve Lewis, "Basic Bible Interpretation: Understanding the Setting of a Bible Passage," Available at <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Bible_Interpretation/04_Setting/04_Setting_Notes.pdf?x=x>.

⁷¹ Jan Paron, "Biblical Interpretation: Hermeneutical Spiral and Culture," Available at <<http://specs12.wordpress.com/2012/08/17/biblical-interpretation-hermeneutical-spiral-and-culture/>>.

context and trying to put into consideration the signs of the time. Currently, not many Christians comprehend or even have an awareness of their culture or the manner in which they read and interpret the Word of God. Some read the Scripture literally without understanding critically the cultural issues that influenced the authors to write it. Absolutely, they miss the goal because the cultural context has changed throughout human history.⁷²

The acknowledgement of the interpreter's circumstance should be the starting point for interpreting the Holy Bible. However, there are some biblical aspects that nowadays do not hold strength in the sense that they were applicable in those ancient days. In this regard, it would turn out that to apply them today would lead to absurdity.⁷³ This is to say that if the Word of God has to make sense in the believer's life, it should be interpreted centered upon the reader's culture and context and also to apply the text critically in the reader's environment.

Cultural fundamentalism puts off the external truths communicated by God to his People. Some Christians have the inclination to think their understanding of the biblical texts stands external to their culture. Additionally, that the prevailing context or sections of the same text that they put too much emphasis remains autonomous of the culture elaborated. In this case, they tend to put off the external truths that God communicated to

⁷² Frances M. Young, Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 45.

⁷³ Austin Cline, "Interpreting the Bible-Cultural Context of Biblical Interpretation," Available at <<http://atheism.about.com/od/thebible/a/CulturalContextBibleInterpretation.htm>>.

his people. Therefore, they put too much prominence to what is appropriate and accommodating to their culture failing to acknowledge the universal truth.⁷⁴

2.7.2 Authors and Readers of the Holy Bible

Would culture allow modern scholars and Christians especially to put themselves in the shoes of the Scripture scholar? Failing to admit the cultural impacts surrounding the author and the reader weakens the deep understanding of the message revealed by God. Earlier on, this work admitted that cultural influences namely historical, political, social, economic among others are concomitants with the believer's interpretation of the Bible.⁷⁵ These are situations and experiences pertinent to the contemporary man, and they do not nullify the interpretation due to the fact they are part and parcel of their life and indeed they affect their understanding of the Bible. The manner in which people read the Holy Bible in the 5th century ancient Rome, 15th century France, 19th century Africa would not be the same in the contemporary times. The approach and contextual issues have drastically changed but the truth derived from the Scripture never changes.⁷⁶ Hence, it is relevant noting that authors of the Bible wrote addressing certain issues that affected the society; thus the current reader has to put himself in the shoes of the author in order to discover the universal truth.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Frances M. Young, Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 48.

⁷⁵ William J. Larkin Jr, Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics: Interpreting and Applying the Authoritative Word in a Relativistic Age (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2003), p. 50.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 53.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 55.

At this point, there are efforts to dictate on some interpretations of the Bible to other people. In other words, it refers to imposition there may be towards understanding and interpreting the Bible to other cultures. Consequently, this makes the Bible a weapon of reprimanding others when culture of the other emerges as inferior. This work states categorically that God reveals himself through human history and in different cultures. Therefore, it beats logic to use the Scripture to undermine the indigenous and traditional believers arguing their practices are invalid.⁷⁸ When one embraces prejudice claiming that his culture is the only authentic one, he undermines others way of life, beliefs, norms, and practices et cetera. There are risks attempting to impose the culture inherent in us basing it on biblical times or interpreting the Gospel message as merely culturally founded.⁷⁹

As indicated earlier, appropriate interpretation of the Bible unquestionably demands that one understands the historical background and the cultural environment of what occurred. Then, only by analyzing such matters critically, would it be possible to make a modern application and discover the biblical teachings behind it. Undoubtedly, the same biblical principles and teachings employ in a distinct way in the contemporary world.⁸⁰ But, unfortunately, many scholars and even Christians conclude that the instructions or directives of the Bible were relevant only for the time and for the people for whom it was written.

⁷⁸ William J. Larkin Jr, Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics: Interpreting and Applying the Authoritative Word in a Relativistic Age (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2003), p. 57.

⁷⁹ Robert Cottrill, “Cultural Interpretation: Is Bible Interpretation to Be Culturally Based?” Available at <<http://www.wordwise-bible-studies.com/cultural-interpretation.html>>.

⁸⁰ William J. Larkin Jr, Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics: Interpreting and Applying the Authoritative Word in a Relativistic Age (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2003), p. 58.

2.7.3 Modern Views

Another question to be answered is, ‘how culture today would help modern Christians assimilate outdated themes in the Bible?’ It is precise that some information got from the Bible cannot be used today because of the following factors:

- They were insignificant in a future time to imply that current events have condensed them out of action.
- Only a particular Bible passage maintains them. There are commands of God in the Scripture and some people follow them.
- The idea behind the commandments and teachings restricts to the culture or traditions proper to antique periods
- The command, information or teaching communicated currently would not exactly be the same as to the old times

The following are some examples of modern time culture or practices that can impede effective interpretation of the Bible.

2.7.3.1 Putting Head Coverings for Women

It is crucial noting that the first century Greco-Roman culture provides an understanding of the issue of head coverings for women. In that context wearing head covers in public places was an indication of submission of a woman to her husband. In the contemporary world, wearing a headscarf or not does not make any significance related to the husband-wife relationship. Some early missionaries dictated this culture to many African tribes to the extent of stopping women, and young girls to attend church gatherings without a scarf. The Africans did not understand the sense behind that. They

did not cover their heads and in many occasions some of them shaved their heads entirely for hygienic purposes yet remained remarkably faithful to their husbands.⁸¹

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the biblical truth remains pertinent for centuries. The submission of the wife to her husband has never been annulled. Indeed, a number of scriptural texts support it to demonstrate respect and love and this reinforces their marriage.⁸²

2.7.3.2 The Holy Kiss

The Holy Scripture talks many times of the issue to greet the other with a kiss. For example, “Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings” (Rom. 16:16). Evidently, this was a traditional way of greeting the people in that time. Definitely this would be something strange if one would still hold this practice valid and doing so in the modern world would send a conflicting message. In South American countries, and particularly in Colombia, men and women greet one another with a hug, but this is among the ones who know each other. It does not mean that one has to give a hug to everybody they meet in the street. Nevertheless, the gospel truth is still valid; the virtue of showing hospitality and friendship is binding, even though its expression is in different forms depending with the cultural context. In many parts of the world, this expression is through handshakes, hugs or even giving pats on the back.⁸³

⁸¹ William J. Larkin Jr, Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics: Interpreting and Applying the Authoritative Word in a Relativistic Age (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2003), p. 34.

⁸² Robert Cottrill, “Cultural Interpretation: Is Bible Interpretation to Be Culturally Based?” Available at <<http://www.wordwise-bible-studies.com/cultural-interpretation.html>>.

⁸³ David Lyle Jeffrey, Houses of the Interpreter: Reading Bible, Reading Culture (Texas: Baylor University Press, 2003), p. 38.

2.7.3.3 Animal Sacrifices and Observance of Sabbath

The Old Testament describes about different types of sacrifices and in most cases animals and/or birds are sacrificed. This practice gets its accomplishment by the coming of Jesus Christ. The death of Christ accomplished this command implying that there is no need of making these sacrifices any more. Christ has redeemed the whole world and the modern man need not make any animal sacrifices for the forgiveness of his sins, Christ Himself has sacrificed for him.

In the same line, the modern world is not under the Jewish Law; almost all Christian denominations do not observe the Jewish Sabbath day. It does not matter which day one dedicates for God. And also, the same Scripture states that no one should make judgment to others regarding their Sabbath keeping. “Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ” (Col. 2:16-17).⁸⁴

It is clear that the Jewish Sabbath observance is on the seventh day of the week. For the Christians, the Lord’s Day fall on the first day and surely the significance of these two days are different. The emphasis still lies on the fact that the biblical truth is pertinent regardless of time. The principle of allocating one day aside for the Lord and the urge to balance the daily activities with the rest are inseparable things since they apply significantly in the modern cultural setup.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Bible, New International Version (NIV): p. 876.

⁸⁵ Robert Cottrill, “Cultural Interpretation: Is Bible Interpretation to Be Culturally Based?” Available at <<http://www.wordwise-bible-studies.com/cultural-interpretation.html>>.

2.7.3.4 The Washing of Foot

During the last supper Jesus ate and drank with his disciples followed by the washing of their feet. Jesus said to them, “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (Jn. 13:15).⁸⁶ Some Christians take this as the Gospel truth that they should do the same to wash another’s feet. Nevertheless, this gesture of washing was done in a definite time and space and in a specific cultural setup. This was to accomplish a certain need that would not necessarily be done in the same manner in the contemporary world.

From the ancient history, most people wore open sandals and yet walked over dusty paths. Basing the argument from this condition, there emerged a concrete need for the hospitality that evolved. When one visited a home, he would be provided with water to wash the feet and in most cases one assisted by a slave.⁸⁷ Hence, critically looking at this cultural context, Jesus used the gesture to deliver the Gospel message. From His disciples, certain argument has been developed about who was the greatest among them. “Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest” (Lk. 22:24).⁸⁸ Therefore, to counter attack this problem Jesus performed this gesture as an attitude they should embrace by putting themselves in the condition of a slave and rendering a service to all.

The Holy Scripture is not an easy text to interpret if one reads it literally and applies all that it contains. The scriptural work will only be effective if the reader puts

⁸⁶ Bible, New International Version (NIV): p. 802.

⁸⁷ Robert Cottrill, “Cultural Interpretation: Is Bible Interpretation to Be Culturally Based?” Available at <<http://www.wordwise-bible-studies.com/cultural-interpretation.html>>.

⁸⁸ Bible, New International Version (NIV): p. 785.

himself into the cultural context of the author. Gradually, it is possible to capture a concrete understanding of the message that can only be achieved by analyzing comprehensively the prevailing context at that time. It also demands one to be aware that the scriptural truth is constant. It is only through such acknowledgement that it is possible to apply to the modern culture without causing damages to it. Culture is rich as well as dynamic so the modern world has a different perspective of looking at things. It is then true that culture can impede effective interpretation of the Bible if one does not comprehensively analyze the situations critically.⁸⁹

2.7.4 Impact of Culture on the Ability to Comprehend Biblical Truths

Having defined the word culture earlier in the study, it is time to tackle the above theme. From the definition of culture, it is clear that it occupies a central role in the manner in which the Bible is interpreted. This is because there is a close relationship between the biblical text as it is interpreted and the people for which this interpretation is directed. Furthermore, each and every individual lives in a community with a cultural structure that moulds his way of thinking. A person's culture influences the way he relates with other people, the way he sees and interprets things.⁹⁰

Consequently, one's cultural viewpoint influences the way an individual engages the scriptural texts because culture dwells in between the lector and the transcript.

⁸⁹ Israel Knohl, "Cain: Son of God or Son of Satan?" in Jewish Biblical Interpretation and Cultural Exchange: Comparative Exegesis in Context (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p. 45.

⁹⁰ George F. Wright and Andrew C. Robinson, "The Authorship of the Pentateuch," in The Fundamentals: The Famous Sourcebook of Foundational Biblical Truths (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1990), p. 24.

Therefore a person's perspective originates from culture. Culture is a way to identify hypotheses that leads to thinking. It is for this reason that people tend to view and interpret the Bible through the angle of their historical, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds among others.⁹¹ It is of great importance to underline that culture is an opening through which people approach the Scriptures. That is why an individual cannot interpret a book like the Holy Bible without the influence of all these factors. The attitude of the interpreter also matters. All these elements point to how the final interpretation would be. This is why engagement with culture should come first while the Scriptures appear only in this milieu.⁹²

People may be ignorant of the degree to which their context influences their biblical interpretation but this does not change the fact. This does not imply only to the biblical interpreters but also to the authors who wrote the Bible many centuries ago. The greater part of the scriptural texts as in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament was based on Eastern way of thinking and ethnic social way of life.⁹³

It is good to highlight that the most fundamental assertion of scriptural interpretation is that each and every lector brings his or her philosophy (this term means all the underlying beliefs, attitudes and values that makeup one's connections with the world) to the reading. The individual's philosophy can be either theological, rational or both. The philosophies of the people enlighten their reading and interpretation.⁹⁴

⁹¹ George F. Wright and Andrew C. Robinson, "The Authorship of the Pentateuch," in The Fundamentals: The Famous Sourcebook of Foundational Biblical Truths (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1990), p. 24.

⁹² Ibid, p. 26.

⁹³ Ibid, p. 27.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 28.

The evidence of the previous assertions about how culture influence the interpretation of the Bible is to be seen, for example, in two different cultures: Western Culture and African Culture. It is well visible that there exist great differences between the ways in which people from the Western world act, think, and interpret reality and the way people in Africa do it. The fact is that most of Western culture is saturated with individualism or self-interest. This is merely to their point of view of the world. However, as the world is today and especially in Africa, ethnical culture still exists. In most African countries, the main worry is not the individual but rather the family at large or the extended community. Here, the sense of community and social obligation remains greater.⁹⁵

Thus, from the above example, it is logical to state that the understanding and the interpretation of the Bible by Westerners is most frequently molded by a model that is meticulously based on individualism. Hence, they tend to interpret biblical texts centering on its author. Accordingly, most of the time would be spent on the analysis of the writer at the expense of what the scriptural text itself has to present. The Africans will be inclined to interpret the Scriptures from a communal perspective with a focus on how the Bible developed from community effort while at the same time showing how God values the community of faith.⁹⁶

In addition, culture may cause an individual to impose his own cultural ideologies while interpreting the Bible. Moreover, because there is tendency to interpret the biblical texts from one's way of life, that is, there is an inclination to relate the scriptural text with

⁹⁵ David Heagle, "The Bible and Modern Criticism," in The Fundamentals: The Famous Sourcebook of Foundational Biblical Truths (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1990), p. 31.

⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 33.

one's day-to-day life. Moreover, interpretation of the Scriptures is greatly affected by the language of the interpreter since the meaning of a word differs from one language to the other.

It can be said that culture conditions the ways in which people read and interpret their Bible. This is due to the fact that there is a close relationship between the Bible as interpreted and the people for which this interpretation is directed.⁹⁷

2.8 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter furnishes the reader with critical issues that ought to be taken into account with regard to understand the degree to which culture impacts on the interpretation of the Bible. It was imperative to define culture and address its main dynamics. At that point the researcher did not discuss its relationship in depth to biblical interpretation. However, throughout the chapter there were guiding principles that would be used in the analysis section in view of addressing the main objectives of the study. In the process, the chapter also looked at some issues underlying the issue of interpretation of the Bible. Actually, this was addressed as a theme by itself. So, the reader got to see the issues that need to be discussed when looking at interpretation of the Scripture. The research went further to assess the relationship between culture and interpretations of biblical truths.

⁹⁷ Huzar Mair, "Culture and the Quest for Biblical Truths," *Theology Review Journal*, 3, No. 6 (June 2010), p. 10.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the Research Methodology. The most widely used method for data collection can be termed as secondary research. This process entails accessing and evaluating the information collected by the originator or a distributor of primary research. Secondary research also entails gathering information from third-party sources such as articles in magazines, research reports from marketing, accounting records, company websites and sales, as the case may be. Also, any collected information used by the marketer that comes from any internal or external source amounts to secondary research.

3.1 Advantages

The advantages of secondary research are as follows:⁹⁸

3.1.1 Ease to Access

Secondary research carries with it many advantages. The ability for easy access to many collections of the secondary data amounts to one of the advantages. Long ago, those who want to access secondary data could require going to the library or waiting for the reports to be mailed by ship. Today, with the technological development and easy access online, secondary research becomes more accessible. This makes convenience and high quality for the methods used for all sources of secondary research.

⁹⁸ Rajendra Kumar C, Research Methodology (New Delhi: APH Publishing Corporation, 2008), p. 34.

3.1.2 Cheap Cost to Acquire

Nowadays, the availability of the secondary data has allowed the researcher to acquire valuable information for little or no cost. Nevertheless, if the researchers had to do the research themselves, the exercise will cost much lesser.

3.1.3 Clarification of the Research Question

The researcher may get an opportunity to clarify the research question due to the use of the secondary research. Secondary research is a method more often used prior to the primary research to help present much more clarity in research work.

3.1.4 May Answer Research Question

The secondary data collection in most cases assists in opening up and align the sphere of the large-scale primary research. Through the secondary sources, the researcher comes to comprehend that all the information desired can easily be established. In this sense, it eradicates the need and expense to carry out the primary research.

3.1.5 Difficulty in Conducting Primary Research

In most cases when the secondary research goes underway, then the question is how the information can be collected and can be displayed. This includes information on how the data collection came about and the troubles come across while carrying out the primary research. When the challenges faced are outlined, it may influence the researcher to come to a decision that the potential information acquired is not worth enough when compared to the potential difficulties in carrying out the research.

3.2 Disadvantages

The following are the disadvantages of secondary research method:⁹⁹

3.2.1 Quality of Research

In this sense, the marketer controls so much the originators of the primary research, and they become largely self-governed. Consequently, it strictly scrutinizes the secondary research since the origin of the information may be doubtful. The information provided needs to be critically evaluated by the researcher, checking its validity and its reliability.

3.2.2 Not Specific to Researcher's Needs

Generally, secondary data may not be handled in a manner that exactly meets the researchers' satisfactions. Therefore, this makes the researcher to rely on secondary data that are accessible and classified in a way that is parallel to their requirements.

3.2.3 Incomplete Information

Researchers in most cases find information that appears precious and shows a lot of potential. This does not guarantee complete information or a full description of the research to expand the full cost of the study. This happens because many researchers who also happen to be suppliers over free selections of what they research while charging expensive in order to get the full report.

⁹⁹ Gordon Rugg and Marian Petre, A Gentle Guide to Research Methods (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2007), p. 45.

3.2.4 Date of Information

A lot of caution should be exercised while using dated information from the past when using the secondary research. With lots of competition in fast changing industries, it should be clear that outdated research information may not be effective or may even have little or no significance to the present market condition.

3.3 Secondary data

This can be termed data brought together, coming from sources published long ago in any other form. When the literature can be evaluated in any research, it shows that the basing lies on secondary data frequently from books, journals and periodicals.

3.3.1 Importance of Secondary Data

Although secondary data can be not very necessary, yet its importance cannot be ignored. Sometimes can be complex to get information from the primary data, in these cases, getting information from secondary sources is simple and probable. When primary data cannot be reached or cannot be accessible, then the secondary data becomes the option at hand. For instance, if the research aims at transsexual psychology, and it presents difficulty in getting transsexuals, and sometimes may not be willing to disclose any information, in this case, one can collect data from books or other published sources.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Earl Babbie, The Basics of Social Research (Wadsworth: Cengage Learning, 2008), p. 44.

3.3.2 Sources of Secondary Data

In most cases, the secondary data is readily available. Now with the electronic media and Internet, the availability of secondary data becomes much easier.¹⁰¹

3.3.2.1 Published Printed Sources

Many published printed sources exist. Many factors should be considered in presenting their credibility; for instance, the writer, the time and date when published, and the publishing company. Sources that are new will be more competitive, this does not mean that old sources are obsolete but new researches bring new facts into light.

3.3.2.2 Books

The use of the book becomes very necessary since they can be easily found. Even before, an individual begins to research, book can already be found at the researcher's disposal. After the selection of the topic, books give a general view to what extent the work has already been done or completed on the same topic and from there, prepare the literature review. Books can be known to be authentic secondary source.

3.3.2.3 Journals/Periodicals

When dealing with data collection, journals and periodicals become very important. The advantage of journals, they offer up-to-date information that sometimes cannot be found in books. On the other hand, Journals can give information on the very specific topic of research rather discussion about more broad topics.

¹⁰¹ Earl Babbie, The Basics of Social Research (Wadsworth: Cengage Learning, 2008), p. 46.

3.3.2.4 Magazines/Newspapers

Magazines can be termed as effective but not very reliable while newspapers are more reliable and in many cases the information can only be found from newspapers just like some cases of political studies.

3.3.2.5 Published Electronic Sources

Today, with the advancement of technology, Internet takes the center stage of this progress, fast and reachable to many people. No doubt that much of information not available in printed form can be found in the Internet. Today, unlike in the past when the credibility of the Internet could be questioned it carries the trust. Today, most of the journals and the books can be found online. Some are free, but others one pays some fee.

3.3.2.6 E-journals

Can be easily found than printed journals. Without prior subscription, latest journals are difficult to retrieve. But now in the universities, with the e-library, a journal can be easily viewed, printed and even make orders for those not available.

3.3.2.7 General Websites

They do not contain very reliable information. This makes its content be checked for the reliability before quoting from them.

CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDY PRESENTATION

This chapter articulates on the main cultural case studies on countries randomly picked up from the West, Africa and Asia.

4.1 Europe

The European culture can be described as a multiple culture. Regions and religions opposing one another and many of them claimed to identify cultural fault lines across the continent. A student who wants to study in depth can see that there is no such ‘common culture’ or ‘common values’; it differ from region to region, religion to religion et cetera.¹⁰² In this study, we just pick Italy and Spain to see the diverse cultures.

4.1.1 Italy

4.1.1.1 Religion

According to the current statistics, about 88% of the Italian population is Roman Catholic. The rest 12% comprises irreligious groups together with some Muslims and Orthodox and Eastern Rite Catholics et cetera.¹⁰³ The overall supernatural beliefs are attributed to the Roman Catholic Church that is interconnected with other antique beliefs extending from the old ages. For instance, in Sicily, Arabic and Greek aspects have intermingled with famous Spanish beliefs and been integrated into Catholicism.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Wikipedia, “Culture of Europe,” Available at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_of_Europe>.

¹⁰³ Wikipedia, “Religion in Italy,” Available at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_Italy>.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Cottrill, “Cultural Interpretation: Is Bible Interpretation to Be Culturally Based?” Available at <<http://www.wordwise-bible-studies.com/cultural-interpretation.html>>.

4.1.1.2 Rituals and Holy Places

Italy has 2000 years' fame of holy sites. Rome and the Vatican City only have numerous shrines, relics, and temples. There are relics of Saint Peter and other popes, several relics of various saints and shrines. Sites where there is a belief that the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared, and places of several miracles are present all over the country. On the same side, religious ceremonies and celebrations are numerous.¹⁰⁵ There are the normal memorable days of the Roman Catholic Church that includes Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, and the Immaculate Conception among others. Additionally, there are local saints and appearances of the holy pontiff. Other events include the beatification and canonization of new saints, several blessings that may be at the personal level or family level and regional feast commemorations. Additionally, daily and weekly mass celebrations are among many other practices and activities done in the religious aspect. There are several novenas, rosary prayers, sodalities, men's and women's movements, and various religious or quasi-religious practices.¹⁰⁶

4.1.1.3 Death and Afterlife

Italians commonly believe in the existence of life after death in which there is the remuneration of the righteous while the wicked punished. There is a general belief in a site where there is purification of sins commonly known as purgatory. According to the Italians belief, heaven and hell are facts and realities. In their religious practices, there is

¹⁰⁵ Frank A. Salamone, "Countries and Their Cultures: Italy," Available at <<http://www.everyculture.com/Ge-It/Italy.html>>.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

the remembrance of the deceased. Modern funerals are conducted in funeral parlors. There is always an invitation to respect the deceased. Failure to attend a memorial mass for a family member or a friend is a cause for a break of relationship unless there is a genuine reason.¹⁰⁷

4.1.2 Spain

4.1.2.1 The Relative Status of Women and Men

The women from Spain under Castilian law have the right to inherit property equally like their brothers. They may also take care and dispose it as they wish. This independence of responsibility according to tradition is handed over to the man during his marriage, but women who are not married or widows could exercise the power of their belongings independently. Nowadays spouses are totally equal when it refers to the law.¹⁰⁸

The high class, royal and noble female's succession to family titles happens when they do not have brothers. In some places of Spain, a woman can be a beneficiary to the family estate. However, women do not alter their birth surnames when they marry in whichever part of Spain and can possess public identities fairly different from those of their husbands.¹⁰⁹ Though women were traditionally homemakers, nowadays they are actively involved in business, or politics and other professions.

¹⁰⁷ Frank A. Salamone, "Countries and Their Cultures: Italy," Available at <<http://www.everyculture.com/Ge-It/Italy.html>>.

¹⁰⁸ Susan Tax Freeman, "Countries and Their Cultures: Spain," Available at <<http://www.everyculture.com/Sa-Th/Spain.html>>.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

4.1.2.2 Marriage, Family and Kinship

Spaniards nowadays marry for reciprocal attraction and stay away from the idea of organized marriages. Class realization and material self-centeredness, nevertheless, direct people to socialization and marry extensively within their respective social classes or to target for a tie with a partner who is in a better position. Traditionally, having property was a significant concern for farmers, with welfare frequently calculating for more than love. Breaking of the marriage was not encouraged or practiced. On the other hand, long courtships provided couples with compatibility before they make a commitment to their marriage vows. Marriage is a partnership but an extra input is required of the couple, and the bringing up of a family is an important aspect. Remarriage for widowed persons who pass the childbearing age was considered as vulgar in the community. This tradition is turning to be old-fashioned. Divorce is a practice in the contemporary time; relationships and come-we-stay marriages are progressively more and permitted, and the finances of marriage for many people free from the bonds to landed assets obtained when Spain was more profoundly rural and practiced agriculture.

4.1.2.3 Domestic Unit

Many people from Spain live as small nuclear families of parents and unmarried children, and this is a vast ideal consideration. A Spaniard saying states that “*casado casa quiere*” (a married man needs a house). Aged spouses or unmarried adults opt to stay on their own.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Susan Tax Freeman, “Countries and Their Cultures: Spain,” Available at <<http://www.everyculture.com/Sa-Th/Spain.html>>.

4.1.2.4 Child Rearing and Education

There is a perception that the birth of babies is viewed as the principal aim of marriage. Children of the opposite sexes are considered and brought up with affection, by parents, guardians, aunts and uncles, and other family members. Children extend that love in return; a degree of obedience is a requirement, but exhibitions of obstinacy or irritability are not sternly reprimanded.

Bringing up children is not rigid as such, but as they grow day by day, it is a requirement to comprehend the constraints surrounding them and to appreciate respect and helpfulness, as they get closer to the age at which they start school and in most cases at the age of six. The atmosphere of children is penetratingly social not normally enhanced by large numerals of toys or furniture for children. Education is also regarded as a basic requirement or right for children.¹¹¹

4.1.2.5 Religious Practices

Spain is tremendously a catholic country for centuries though there are a very small percentage of non-Catholics. The religious practitioners including ordinary clergy and followers of monastic orders like monks and nuns have membership in the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy. The ladder of religious officialdom has its highpoint in the Vatican and the governing office of the Pope.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Susan Tax Freeman, "Countries and Their Cultures: Spain," Available at <<http://www.everyculture.com/Sa-Th/Spain.html>>.

¹¹² Ibid.

4.1.2.6 Rituals and Holy Places

Spanish villages from hamlets to large cities and various neighborhoods within population places each have patron saints. Shrines, which are connected with miracles, are frequently situated outside of population sites, and there are frequent visits, as are churches, by individual practitioners and devotees or by large groups on the days linked with the holy icons to which they surrender their devotion. Communal pilgrimages to shrines in the upcountry sides on their particular days are *romerías* and normally involve picnicking as well as mass celebrations and prayer.

The holy sites of Spanish Catholicism range from shrines, from caves or country huts to elaborate constructions and temples, from local parish churches to cathedrals. Their feasts spread through the year and do not implicate the nation or necessarily even an entire town or region. These official Church holidays include Easter, Christmas, or Corpus Christi and the day of Santiago, the national patron et cetera. Though the religious national holidays are celebrated with formal masses, it varies from place to place according to the traditions of a particular region.¹¹³

4.2 USA and UK: Cultural Influence on Interpretation of the Bible

The word ‘culture’ has different meanings but the best suitable definition, according to our topic, is a set of erudite human conduct patterns such as ethics, knowledge, law, belief, tradition, and any other abilities and lifestyles attained by individual as an affiliate of society. The word ‘interpretation’ is a noun that refers to a

¹¹³ Susan Tax Freeman, “Countries and Their Cultures: Spain,” Available at <<http://www.everyculture.com/Sa-Th/Spain.html>>.

way of explaining or telling the meaning of a text or phrase. Hence, biblical interpretation is the way of explaining different types of texts in the Bible.¹¹⁴

In order to interpret a biblical text, it is very important to consider the following aspects that the mentality of the writer, the seclusion of the text and the mentality of the lector. The mentality of the writer demands the interpreter to emphasize on what the writer had in mind. The seclusion of the text calls for the separation of the text from both the writer and the lector, and all other exterior aspects. Finally, the mentality of the lector emphasize on detachment of the text from its past background to give its significance in a given instant and culture, according to the context. Here the lector determines the significance of a transcript.¹¹⁵

On one hand, the community life and popular way of life of the United States integrates a lot of Christian principles particularly liberation, deliverance, ethics, and morals. The state is comprised of local cultures, and that facilitate one to comprehend a lot of things concerning contemporary American living. Americans value the principles of person's freedom, individuality, patriotism, self-reliance, pluralism, unselfishness, egalitarianism, Judeo-Christian morality, populism, feminism and democratic system. There is a belief that the person's search for self-centeredness leads to the most excellent outcome for both the person and humanity as a whole. In addition, it is assumed to be a thriving method for both financial achievement and most favorable political function. Americans are often mesmerized by innovative technology and novel gadgets.

¹¹⁴ John Burt Foster Jr. and Wayne J. Froman, Thresholds of Western Culture: Identity, Postcoloniality, Transnationalism (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 26.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 26.

A lot of the new-fangled hi-tech innovation in the contemporary world were either invented in the United States or first far and wide assumed by Americans.¹¹⁶

Many Americans believe that, by means of technology a lot of the tribulations in the general public can be alleviated. Another cultural element is the language where there are over 300 languages in addition to English that are spoken by the indigenous people as well as others that were brought in as migrants. Americans treasure logic and precise thoughts. Individuality is cherished as revealed in the family entity. People are overconfident of their personal undertakings, inventiveness and achievement. On the other hand, the people from UK share a lot in terms of the culture. However, they are a bit reserved and private in that privacy is exceedingly vital. Britons are more enclosed in their body language and hand signs while speaking. The United Kingdom is as well outstanding in science and know-how. There is concoction of ethnic factions and cultures in UK. Britons are more concerned with issues revolving around their personal lives such as family and workplaces.¹¹⁷

It is evident that both Americans and British speak English although they have different English accents and pronunciations. However, the language is very similar. The American way of life shares a lot with the British traditions since the structure of the American regime is akin to the ordinary bylaw of the British. There are vast discrepancies between the people of America and those of UK in terms of way of life. Though the idiom spoken in both nations is the same, i.e., English, both states have

¹¹⁶ John Burt Foster Jr. and Wayne J. Froman, Thresholds of Western Culture: Identity, Postcoloniality, Transnationalism (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 29.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 30.

divergent spelling and accent. The American pronunciation is considerably dissimilar from the British pronunciation because of their divergences in the articulation of vowels. There is divergence in regard to their everyday life as it manifests itself explicitly in activities like sports. Another difference goes to their personality whereby the Americans are more courteous and very social. On the other hand, the Britons are more reserved preferring private space and by and large endorse silence at the expense of making conversation.¹¹⁸

Over the years, many changes have occurred in interpreting the Scriptures due to reciprocal influence between the study of Bible and the world of technological growth, cultural norms, intellectual investigations et cetera. The European exploration of the material world has a lot of effect on the study of Bible. Equally, the biblical interpretation has its effect on the surrounding world. Hence, the undertakings in the community in which the study of the Bible takes place cannot be overlooked.

Linguistic study manifests that the exact significances of a word can change due to the language of its interpreter. As it is well known, the Bible was originally written in Hebrew and Greek languages. Given that the language spoken in both USA and UK is English, which is different from Greek and Hebrew, it is valid to state that when people from these states interpret the Bible, the exact significances of words will definitely change.¹¹⁹ Moreover, there are other languages spoken in these countries that will affect the interpretation of the Bible. Besides, the meanings of terms can vary with time, people and in accordance with its context. Also, the text has no significance until they pass

¹¹⁸ John Burt Foster Jr. and Wayne J. Froman, Thresholds of Western Culture: Identity, Postcoloniality, Transnationalism (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 32.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p. 33.

through the brain of a person. Hence, the interpretations of the Scriptures always reflect the way of life of that period in order to make sense to the individuals' living in that given way of life.¹²⁰

This goes back to the time of Jesus; He interpreted the Old Testament Scriptures in accordance with the Jewish traditions and beliefs because they were intrinsic in the culture of the people to whom He was preaching. Furthermore, the Jews interpreted the Old Testament according to their societal and intellectual advancement wants. Paul had to adapt his preaching to other cultures he came across. He was very conversant with the cultures of the pagans and other people whom he met, even though he never changed the basic message. Paul himself says: "Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Cor. 9:19-22).¹²¹ Although Greek way of life covered the scope of philosophy

¹²⁰ John Burt Foster Jr. and Wayne J. Froman, Thresholds of Western Culture: Identity, Postcoloniality, Transnationalism (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 35.

¹²¹ Bible, New International Version (NIV): p. 853.

and science, it had a great influence on the interpretation of the Bible. For this reason, the Greek culture is visible in the biblical interpretation of the time.¹²²

It is crucial to state that people do not think and interpret things in the same manner. However, many biblical lecturers and interpreters bring prejudices to the text taking his interpretation as the correct one. Therefore, biblical interpretation is influenced by the individual's intellectual capability. Moreover, much of the present way of life relies on technology in its diverse forms. The majority of the people from USA and UK have a well-advanced intellectual state. This is visible in their inventions and technology. This technological excellence makes the Americans and Britons to read the Bible in search of factual message and biblical texts that be verified intellectually. There would be a form of scientific interpretation of the Bible. Worldly intellectual interpretation of the Bible in the USA and in UK is very evident.¹²³

The interpretation of the Bible by Americans and Britons is molded by a model based on the individualism that infuses their culture. Hence, biblical textual interpretation centers on its author trying to prove his existence. African Americans' interpretation of the Bible dwells on the value of freedom, equality and liberation. They have nevertheless displayed more liveliness than doctrinarism in their analysis of the Scriptures. Having turned to religious fundamentalism, their biblical studies and interpretation is, as a result, based on biblical philosophical censure and racial-ethnic marginal studies. In Scripture studies, philosophical criticism forefronts power relationships in society and way of life,

¹²² John Burt Foster Jr. and Wayne J. Froman, Thresholds of Western Culture: Identity, Postcoloniality, Transnationalism (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 37.

¹²³ John Burt Foster Jr. and Wayne J. Froman, Thresholds of Western Culture: Identity, Postcoloniality, Transnationalism (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 39.

with marginal criticism centering on racial-ethnic development and relationships. Thus, the African Americans' Scripture interpretation comprises an exercise in marginal criticism from the viewpoint of the Latin community in the country. Additionally, this culture checks the use of the Scriptures across the intellectual-erudite and other customs of the Scriptures on behalf of Latinos.¹²⁴

The USA and UK'S culture have queer interpretation of the Bible. This interpretation is caused by movements for social and spiritual inclusion of bisexuals, gays and lesbian. Queer interpretation of the Scriptures reread the texts of the Bible from the perspective of bisexual, gay and lesbian experiences. Hence, the existence of many social movements in both USA and UK influences the biblical interpretation.¹²⁵ Each and every movement interpreted the Bible in line with their own perspective and for this reasons so many interpretations has come forth. These innumerable interpretations, instead of helping the ordinary Christian to understand the Word of God, put them in peril.

Continued relationship with the dead also prevailed in Europe before the preaching of the gospel. It was found among the Celts, Slavs, Sabaeans, Lithuanians and Teutonic. Though not as fully developed in Europe as in the East, the Romans and Greeks had the basic elements of ancestral veneration. The Romans believed in the survival of the soul after death. Because they believed that the dead could affect the living, for better or for worse, practices developed in order to propitiate them so as to maintain harmonious relationships between the living and the dead. It was necessary for

¹²⁴ John Burt Foster Jr. and Wayne J. Froman, Thresholds of Western Culture: Identity, Postcoloniality, Transnationalism (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 41.

¹²⁵ Ibid, p. 44.

every family, not only to propitiate the ancestral spirits, but also to bear children who could continue to perform those sacrifices. All the activities associated with ancestor worship among the Romans may be divided into two categories - those associated with proper burial and those associated with placating of the spirits during the regular annual occasions.

The supreme duty towards the dead was burial. The fundamental motive was one of self-protection, on the principle that the ghost of the dead would continue to haunt the living until a place was provided for it. The Romans believed that the dead would not descend to the underworld until they had received their due, and the most essential element was a proper burial.¹²⁶ Offerings were also given to the dead. On the day of the funeral, a sacrificial feast was held at the grave. Nine days of mourning for the dead were held after which another feast was conducted, with offerings given to the dead. This ensured that the deceased was safely housed in the spirit world. This practice made sure that the dead would not return to living again except on the stated occasions, thus guaranteeing peace and tranquility to the living.¹²⁷

On several occasions every year, festivals were held and offerings given to the ancestral spirits. During the nine-days festival, known as *parentalia*, marriages were forbidden and temples were shut. On this occasion the spirits of the dead could appear to the living and protection was needed. Each family decorated the ancestral graves and made offerings to the dead. At the conclusion of the festival, families became reconciled

¹²⁶ John Burt Foster Jr. and Wayne J. Froman, Thresholds of Western Culture: Identity, Postcoloniality, Transnationalism (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 46.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 49.

with each other and quarrels were forgiven. Peace was also made with departed ancestors.¹²⁸

4.3 Asian region

4.3.1 Ancient Persians

Zoroastrianism developed in ancient Persia, modern-day Iran. Zoroaster lived between 600 BC and 1,000 BC, the exact date being uncertain. The leading feature of his worldview was a metaphysical dualism. In seeking to resolve the dilemma of good and evil, he proclaimed a good god (*Ahura Mazda*) and a devil (*Angra Mainyu*), both pre-existent, but with the hope that the good would eventually prevail over evil.¹²⁹ This aspect of evil refers to one theme of the Bible discussed earlier. The critical point is that the belief of some gods in respect to evil would make them slow to interpret the manner in which evil has been presented in the Bible. Zoroaster also taught the resurrection of the dead.¹³⁰

In the region, according to its theoretical schemes, the ancestors, or the souls of the dead, play no part; but practically, in the popular customs and beliefs, the cult of the dead still survives. They not only permit the cult of the dead, but also encourage it in their official ritual. The ancestral spirits are invoked and their aid sought. This custom, so contrary to the teaching of Zoroaster himself, persisted into the Middle Ages when the

¹²⁸ Ibid, p. 51.

¹²⁹ Koichi Iwabuchi, Stephen Muecke and Mandy Thomas, Rogue Flows: Trans-Asian Cultural Traffic (Aberdeen: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), p. 32.

¹³⁰ Ibid, p. 34.

Persians placed meat for their honor, for they believed that the living and the dead were in communion.¹³¹

4.3.2 Folk Buddhism

The reader may wonder why the need to talk about Buddhism and yet they do not use the Bible. According to the researcher, Buddhism serves as a traditional and principal way of life for the Indian community. It means other cultures have evolved from this platform in as much as such may be looked as a revolution. The reader will concur that the Christians from this background suffer Buddhism prejudices. In this regard, it becomes vital to look deeper into Buddhism and somewhat have it as something reflecting the prejudices of all the communities in India.

Gautama, later known as Buddha, was born in Northern India in circa 560 BC in a high-class family that enjoyed luxury. Despite his privileged status and marriage to a princess at the age of sixteen, he was inwardly unhappy, longing for peace of mind and heart. Leaving his wife and family he became an ascetic Brahmin (Hindu) philosopher and practiced the discipline of yoga, but this brought no peace. He then adopted the extreme bodily asceticism of Jainism. For five years he practiced a rigid self-discipline that left him skin and bones, but this self-mortification did not provide peace of mind.¹³² Dejected, he sat down at the foot of a tree and meditated. Suddenly, the answer came in this enlightenment - desire was the stumbling block to his own salvation. If he could get

¹³¹ Ibid, p. 37.

¹³² Katy Gerner, Religions Around the World: Buddhism (Tarrytown: Marshall Cavendish, 2009), p. 45.

rid of the carnal desire to live, he would know peace.¹³³ He came to understand that eliminating sensual desires would be a foretaste of Nirvana, a state that is free from sufferings, free of endless cycles of birth and rebirth.¹³⁴ However, Buddha did not resort to religious devotion of prayers in order to attain his desired end. His philosophy was a practical atheism; or it might be called, a stick kind of humanism in religion. Though he believed in gods and goddesses, spirits and demons, Buddha felt they were all finite, subject to death and rebirth. He believed everything was changing, illusionary and impermanent. Therefore, prayers and sacrifices to god's spirits were of no values.¹³⁵ Neither did he accept nature worship or reliance on Brahmin priests; instead, each disciple of Buddha was taught to rely on himself to obtain Nirvana. To eliminate desire, an 'enlightened' disciple of Buddha must engage in a life of strict adherence to rules and regulations known as eight-fold path. 'The middle way' taught by Buddha was a life between the two extremes of a life given to pleasures and a life given to self-mortification.¹³⁶

This Buddhist religion is now embraced by one billion followers, mostly in Asia (including Thailand, Laos, Myanmar [Burma], Cambodia, Vietnam, Korea, China, Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Tibet). In the later part of the 20th century, however, Buddhism has made great inroads in the West. This humanistic man-centered religion is eclectic, absorbing ideas from many sources. In this post-modern era of Western history,

¹³³ Anita Ganeri, Atlas of World Faiths: Buddhism (North Mankato: Smart Apple Media, 2008), p. 27.

¹³⁴ Anita Ganeri, Atlas of World Faiths: Buddhism (North Mankato: Smart Apple Media, 2008), p. 29.

¹³⁵ Ibid, p. 32.

¹³⁶ Ibid, p. 37.

Westerners are attracted to a religion of tolerance in which one can pick and choose what to believe and follow. Buddhism teaches that truth lies in the person, not in God or spirits. They teach that problems are due to a person's fault and that the means of salvation is within that person. Buddhism, therefore, appeals to those who reject the objectivity of divine revelation. In the United States, ten million Americans adhere to Buddhism with 1,500 known Buddhist temples.¹³⁷

4.3.2.1 Spirit World and Buddhism

Though Buddha was humanistic in his religious beliefs and not mindful of the spirit world, most followers of Buddha do not adhere to classic Buddhism. The 'real' behavior of most Buddhists does not follow the 'ideal' beliefs of Buddha. Folk Buddhism is predominant throughout Asia. Fear of spirits is most universal among Buddhists. The population of evil spirits in Thailand seems to outnumber the Thai population. Opinions differ over the identity of these spirits, whether they are ghosts of the dead, demons or resident spirits of a plot of land, river or mountain.¹³⁸

A casual walk through the villages in Thailand displays the prominence of 'spirit houses' on every residential plot. It is important to pay respect to the nature spirits residing in the land on which a house is built. This is a Thai custom that predates Buddhism. Spirits can bring sickness, bad dreams, madness, and death. They may haunt houses or possess people. It is necessary to propitiate them so that the spirits may protect the occupants of the land. Inside the little 'spirit houses', perched on a pole, are ceramic

¹³⁷ Carl Olson, The Different Paths of Buddhism: A Narrative-Historical Introduction (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2005), p. 24.

or plastic figurines representing the property of the spirits; most important is the *chao thi* or the ‘lord of the place’, which embodies the spirit who reigns over the property. Daily offerings of rice, sacred leaves, and incense ensure that the spirits are placated and won’t bring trouble. If the ‘spirit house’ is poorly maintained, the spirits may become jealous and return to the human dwelling and cause misfortune.¹³⁹

Legendary animals are used by Folk Buddhists for protection. Buddhist temples are everywhere in Thailand with a reputed 200,000 monks living in 29,000 temples.¹⁴⁰ One always sees hook-like gable fixtures, called *jaofao*, meaning ‘sky lord’. At the roofline corners of the temples are found *naga* heads, dragon-serpent of Hindu-Buddhist mythology. These and other mythological creatures are also sculptured on doors and status to guard and protect the temples from the spirits. In addition to the *naga* are other mythological creatures, including *nak* (two headed river dragon), *chinthe-singha* (guardian lions), *garuda* (magic bird) and *hintha* (a magic duck).¹⁴¹

In order to protect one from sickness brought on by spirits, Buddhist wears charms or uses Buddhist images. ‘Spirit strings’ are worn around the neck, wrist or waist and under the skin. Different kinds of amulets include tiger’s teeth, tiny images of Buddha, auspicious diagrams, likenesses of revered monks. Soldier wears charms to prevent bullets from entering the body. Amulets are worn to attract the opposite sex. Sacred texts are recited over the sick. Candle smoke is used to blow words on a patient,

¹³⁸ Ibid, p. 27.

¹³⁹ Carl Olson, *The Different Paths of Buddhism: A Narrative-Historical Introduction* (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2005), p. 29.

¹⁴⁰ Stephen Metcalf, “A Monk’s Dream Comes to Life,” Available at <http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/buddhistworld/wat_m5.htm>.

¹⁴¹ Adrian Konik, *Buddhism and Transgression: The Appropriation of Buddhism in the Contemporary West* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), p. 34.

while holy water is used for healing or protection. Moreover, Monks provide their services by tattooing the body with sacred syllables and mystical signs and symbols. Village monks will recite sermons of Buddha (sutra), which are believed to provide protection from evil. Key words from a sutra are printed on fans and carried by monks as they move about collecting alms. The common folk perform rituals in Buddhist worship in order to draw assistance from supernatural powers or spirits or from power inherent in the temple image. Those who wear such amulets avoid catastrophe and experience an inner sense of well-being and confidence, it is reported.¹⁴²

Buddhist monks participate in the empowering and distribution of amulets for protection. Found in every village by hundreds, these monks live in communal monasteries (*wat*) and are supported by the alms of the people. At critical moments in the life of a person, monks are called upon to perform ceremonies. The most meritorious of these moments are the times of ordination and cremation, when a layman crosses over into the world of the monk and when the deceased are transferred to the next world. These are merit-making ceremonies.¹⁴³ The central activity of the Merit-making ceremony is the recitation by the monks of one of the appropriate *Pali* chants. At the close of the ceremony the laymen give the monks a traditional offering, including items useful in worship and items of daily use like blankets, tea, sugar or cigarettes.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Adrian Konik, Buddhism and Transgression: The Appropriation of Buddhism in the Contemporary West (Leiden: Brill, 2009), p. 36.

¹⁴³ Ibid, p. 38.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 39.

A major source of income for these monks is the production and sale of amulets. The power of these amulets is enhanced by the character of the monk who prepares them and by the materials used. The recipes for making amulets are jealously guarded. Ingredients of the amulet may include ‘scraps of plaster or bronze from famous images or *stupas*, or even pieces from ancient manuscripts destroyed by fire’. Especially prized are the amulets made by monks with special powers. Most men in Thailand wear phallic amulets, which are worn around their waist and consecrated, of all things, by celibate monks.¹⁴⁵

The association of the phallus with fertility and strength is extended to believe in its power to give prosperity and protection. Ideally, of course, a Thai will follow the precepts of Buddha, which will bring him immediate and long term benefits, but many Thais feel that it is better to be safe than sorry and that a strong talisman or amulet will provide added protection.¹⁴⁶

A ‘spirit doctor’ (*moo phi*) follows certain dietary prescriptions and taboos in order to placate a ‘personal familiar spirit’. The doctors are chosen by the spirit who wants to live in the person. Usually, this is a recently deceased relative who had been a specialist. Once selected, the person must become a spirit doctor or die. Though Buddhism adapts and accommodates many different religious beliefs and philosophies, it is intrinsically related to ancestors worship. And whatever happens in a family when a person dies, the pre-Buddhist religious belief is concerned fundamentally with the

¹⁴⁵ Adrian Konik, *Buddhism and Transgression: The Appropriation of Buddhism in the Contemporary West* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), p. 42.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

worldly problems especially sickness and health. ‘Spirit doctors’ are divine mediums, which provide protective charms and prescribe remedies for healing the sick.¹⁴⁷

4.3.3 India

4.3.3.1 Complexity of Hinduism

Just like the case of Buddhism, the reader may not see any connection between Hinduism and Bible. The two are different entities. However, the researcher opines that Hinduism being an influential way of life also undoubtedly may be said to affect some or few Christian cultures found in the region. Therefore, the reader should look at the matter with deeper reflection and with ability to link the two cultural issues.

India is the home of Hinduism, a religion so complex and diverse; Hinduism is said to be ‘not one religion but a family of religions’. With nearly one billion adherents, Hinduism is the third largest religion in the world.¹⁴⁸ Hinduism has no founder and no central authority. It does not have a unified set of beliefs or single teaching on the way of salvation. Jawaharlal Nehru, a philosopher and the first prime minister of independent India, said that Hinduism is rooted in the *Vedic* Age, extending from circa 1500 BC. During that time the *Indo-Aryan* peoples migrated eastwards from Mesopotamia and the Fertile Crescent. They slowly expanded and divided, the eastern group settling in the ancient Persian Empire.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 47.

¹⁴⁸ Firstpost, “Hinduism third largest religion of world; India home to most religions,” Available at <<http://www.firstpost.com/fwire/hinduism-third-largest-religion-of-world-india-home-to-most-religions-562742.html>>.

¹⁴⁹ Kathleen Kuiper, Understanding India: The Culture of India (New York: Rosen Educational Publishing, 2010), p. 52.

The Hindu sacred Scriptures are the *Vedas*, which were written during that time. The *Vedas* are not a book but a collection of extremely diverse materials composed over a period of a thousand years by a priestly class. It is impossible to reduce the *Vedic* literature to a systematic statement of beliefs. For instance, Orthodox Hindus have an extraordinary wide selection of beliefs and practices to choose from, they can be pantheists, polytheists, monotheists, agnostics, or even atheists, dualists, pluralist, or monist. Their only universal obligation, if they are orthodox, 'is to abide by the rules of their caste and trust that by so doing their next life in the earth will be happier one'. Some scholars opine that Hindus are the people who accept the *Veda* as a normative for religion and practice.¹⁵⁰

Early Hinduism among the *Indo-Aryans* had belief in many gods. The *Rig-Veda*, a collection of religious poetry compiled in ten books, contains hymns addressed to one God, or often two or more gods. These stanzas of praise to the deities originated in antiquity, being composed roughly between 1700 and 1100 BC. The *Vedic* literature developed a pantheon of thirty-three gods but over time this number grew until today Hinduism embraces three hundred thirty million gods.¹⁵¹

The early Hindu religious beliefs were shared by the Iranians, Hittites, Greeks and Romans. The early *Indo-Aryans* worshiped *Dyaus Pitar* or Father Sky (Zeus among the Greeks and Jupiter among the Roman), *Prithivi matar* or Mother of Earth (*Gaia* of the Greeks), *mitra* (*Mithra* of the Iranians) who was perhaps the sun god originally.

¹⁵⁰ Kathleen Kuiper, *Understanding India: The Culture of India* (New York: Rosen Educational Publishing, 2010), p. 54.

¹⁵¹ Wikipedia, "Hindu Deities," Available at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu_deities>.

However, these gods were only conceived of vaguely and appealed to seldom. Displacing them were the nature gods who achieved pre-eminence over those high gods. These nature deities included *Indra*, the leader of gods and lord of heaven; *Rudra*, the god of the tempest; *Vayu*, the god of wind; *Ushas*, the god of the dawn; and *Yama*, the god of the dead (who himself was the first man to die) who became the judge and ruler of the ancestral spirits.¹⁵²

Hinduism evolved over the years with a multiplication of deities and a change in emphases. Jainism and Buddhism sprang up in reaction to the ethical laxity and religious complexity of Hinduism. One might characterize these heresies of Hinduism as atheistic. The Jains maintained that there is no Supreme Ruler of the world to whom one may pray. There are higher beings that people might describe as gods, but they are also finite beings and subject to death as men are; thus, the Jains believe that praying to gods is of no avail.

4.3.3.2 Ancient Belief in Supreme Being

The *Vedas* are divided into four groupings. One such grouping is the *Samhitas*, a collection of hymns used in rituals. The oldest and most important is the *Rig-Veda* that is composed of 1,000 hymns with some of these composed by Aryans before entering India. *Varuna* was the greatest of heavenly gods; he was the guardian of the cosmic order (*rita*), was responsible for the maintenance of both the physical and moral order. He caused the sun to rise and set, the stars shine at his command; and he bestowed the rains that gave life to the earth. The moral laws of the universe were as fixed and immutable as those that governed the natural world, and *Varuna* administered these with the same unswerving

¹⁵² Kathleen Kuiper, *Understanding India: The Culture of India* (New York: Rosen Educational Publishing,

regularity. For this reason prayers for forgiveness of wrongs done to others were addressed to *Varuna*, since wrongdoing disturbed the order of the universe.¹⁵³

It is observed that by far the noblest figure in the *Rig-Veda* is *Varuna*, the god who held supreme place. In the *Vedic* hymns *Varuna* is encompassing heaven. He is the creator and sustainer of all things, the omniscient ruler who watches the whole universe with all seeing, unsleeping eyes, the compassionate protector and helper, the holy one, from whom law and right (*rita*) proceeds, who blesses the righteous, sternly punishes the sinner, pardons the penitent and confers immortality on the faithful dead. Serious sickness and life tribulations were interpreted as derived from *Varuna*'s anger upon breach of his decrees.¹⁵⁴

4.3.3.3 Impersonal Brahman and the Gods

Brahman was described in the *Vedic* literature as the great lord of lords, the god of gods, the master of masters, greater than the great, and the adorable lord of the world. The same *Brahman* is also impersonal - the intelligent Hindu thinks of God as residing within him as the impersonal, all encompassing absolute.¹⁵⁵

The Supreme Being is described as 'beyond the measure of all attributes'. The earlier *Upanishads* referring to the three principal activities of the Supreme Being,

2010), p. 63.

¹⁵³ Ibid, p. 64.

¹⁵⁴ Kathleen Kuiper, *Understanding India: The Culture of India* (New York: Rosen Educational Publishing, 2010), p. 64.

¹⁵⁵ Wikipedia, "Brahman," Available at <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brahman>>.

creation, preservation, and dissolution say everything is born in him [in the beginning] is absorbed in him [in the end], and is sustained in him [in the period of its existence].

How then do the multiplicity of gods relate to Brahman, the Supreme Being? Over time the worship rendered to the Supreme Being was transferred to other gods that sprang up. Side with his belief in the existence of one and only one Supreme Being, a Hindu would appear to an uncritical observer to have faith in the existence of many deities.¹⁵⁶

Many Hindus do believe that the gods are aspects or manifestation of a single, impersonal, transcendent God. They believe that deities of mythology and the icons in the temples are windows into this ultimate reality. The important thing is that the deities as icons in temples mediate between the human world and a divine or sacred reality and that the icon as deity might be seen as spiritualization of matter.

4.3.3.4 Hindu Festivals and Christians

'*Onam*' is a festival celebrated in the state of Kerala in India, commemorating the visit of *Mahabali*, an *Asura* king who ruled Kerala in the ancient times, whom *Mahavishnu* sent to *Patala* (the world inside earth). Though some people argue that *Onam* is a 'harvest festival' at the season of paddy harvest, the Kerala Hindus do not agree with this contention; they have their own rituals in celebrating *Onam*.

¹⁵⁶ Kathleen Kuiper, Understanding India: The Culture of India (New York: Rosen Educational Publishing, 2010), p. 68.

During the time of *Mahabali*'s rule, the people of Kerala were happy and prosperous and for this reason the gods were jealous about *Mahabali*. They approached one of the high gods *Vishnu* (*Mahavishnu*) and he took the form of *Vamana* (a dwarf), approached *Mahabali* and asked three steps of land to live in. *Mahabali* promised him his need and asked to measure three steps of land. *Vamana* then grew to a huge size and with two steps he measured the earth and heaven, there was no place for the third step. *Mahabali*, who was unable to meet his word, asked *Vamana* to measure the third step on his head to honor his promise. With this, *Vishnu* measured the third step on *Mahabali*'s head and sent him to the netherworld. But *Vishnu* was grace enough to grant the request of *Mahabali* to visit his subjects once in a year and this visit is commemorated as *Onam*.¹⁵⁷

This is purely a Hindu mythological story, but the Christians in the province of Kerala celebrate *Onam* as Hindus do. They claim that it is the tradition and culture of the Kerala people. The Kerala Christians forgot the instructions given by God Almighty to Israelites before they entered Canaan. "The LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'I am the LORD your God. You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the LORD your God. Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the LORD'" (Lev. 18:1-5).¹⁵⁸ The present day church

¹⁵⁷ Wikipedia, "Onam," Available at <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Onam>>.

¹⁵⁸ Bible, New International Version (NIV): p. 87.

leaders give more importance to this festival and the celebrations have become very common in the Christian churches in Kerala.

'*Durga Puja*' (worshipping *Durga*, the goddess) is another Hindu festival celebrated all over India, though the customs are different from province to province. It is a tradition of Kerala Hindus to start formal education of their children at the end of this festival.¹⁵⁹ They believe that the children will be blessed by *Saraswati*, daughter of *Durga*,¹⁶⁰ and their studies would not be affected by evil. It is a recent development in the Christian community in Kerala that they also start formal education for their children in the church during this festival, as part of tradition and culture. How the Christians in this region can interpret the Bible with its inherent meaning, when they give more importance to traditions and culture that was prevalent in the pre-Christian era, than Holy Bible? The Word of God Almighty is neglected to upkeep the traditions and culture.

4.3.4 African Cultures: Kenya, Ethiopia and Egypt

Africans believe that God is infinite, is everywhere, is almighty, and is pure.¹⁶¹ Existence of spirits is another imperative characteristic of religion in African customs. The same spirits in various ways operate as a source of morals in the African humanity. They do not entertain things like infidelity, theft, dishonesty et cetera. The Africans strongly believe that spirits punish the culprits or wrongdoers by inflicting them with

¹⁵⁹ Wikipedia, "Durga Puja," Available at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Durga_Puja>.

¹⁶⁰ Wikipedia, "Saraswati," Available at <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saraswati>>.

¹⁶¹ Benson O. Igboin, "Colonialism and African Cultural Values," *African Journal of History and Culture*, 3, No. 6, (July 2011), p. 97.

sickness.¹⁶² Additionally, the observation of medicine and magic is also an important phenomenon in majority of African people. They practice fetishism in which they consider some things; especially artificial ones possess mystical power in them. Magic is the control of events and observable facts by mystical means. They are compound of attitude and observations and a last resort for a believer to have the mystical influence and they can also be used to explain different phenomena and events. Also in African societies exists some religious people who perform some of these rituals, there are indigenous doctors, diviners, sorcerers, traditional midwives. They all have a critical part to play in traditional African society.¹⁶³

Moreover, customary Africans maintain that there is a very close tie connecting the corporeal and incorporeal realms. The ancestors are still part and parcel of people's families and everyone has his or her own memoirs about them. It is widely held that these ancestors make frequent visits to their human families and participate in some activities, though symbolically. They are so much interested and concerned on what is transpiring in their families and hence perceived as protectors who have been brought back into existence but in form of infants. So it can be concluded that religion in traditional Africa set up relies a great deal on the realm of the invisible realities.¹⁶⁴

4.3.4.1 African Cultural Values

¹⁶² Ibid, p. 99.

¹⁶³ David Kiteng, "An Exploration of Kenyan Cultures," *Journal of Cultural Anthropology*, 9, No. 12, (December 2011), p. 24.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 25.

Some of the strong African cultural values are - a strong meaning of community life, enjoy good human relations, a strong sense of sacred life, good in hospitality, sense of the sacred and of religion, sense of time, have respect for authority and the elders and love for language and proverbs.¹⁶⁵

4.3.4.1.1 Sense of Community

As a popular African proverb states, "Go the way that many people go; if you go alone, you will have reason to lament". This shows the great sense of communal togetherness found in every African society. As far as the security is concerned, an African understanding of security and its value depend so much on how the person identifies with the community. A sense of communalism in Africa is a system that is material and supersensible altogether in terms of reference. Africans do believe that this spirit is "god made" since it goes past the people who are living now, and it is man made since it cannot be culturally understood autonomous of those who live now. The true and authentic African culture is identified by, in and through his community. The common belief states that the community is the custodian of the individual; therefore one has to follow where the community leads.¹⁶⁶

4.3.4.1.2 Sense of Good Human Relations

Live-and-let-live is a philosophy based on the life in the African community; it applies to the concrete community and is based on the concept of the clan. The relationship present in the intercommunity can be realized by the interaction of the

¹⁶⁵ "African Cultural Values," Available at <http://www.emeka.at/african_cultural_vaules.pdf>.

different individuals. Research indicates that for the African people, human living concept is defined as a way of life so concerned of human interests and values. This kind of living is often characterized by empathy and human compassion. However, in African community, everyone has a place. The sense of accommodation and caring in African context can be seen in the concern for the weak, aged, incurable, helpless, the sick and good family atmosphere.¹⁶⁷

4.3.4.1.3 Sense of the Sacredness of Life

The authentic African does not like violence since the shedding of blood is detested. They could only kill those who pose threat to the entire community, which are those who cause danger to the life of others and the peace of community at large. This principle of better one man to die than for the whole community to perish is used. The war option was always taken as the last resolution. This is accepted when all formal and normal courses of action for the peace search fails. Within the clan, murder was not encouraged.¹⁶⁸

4.3.4.2 The Samburu Culture

4.3.4.2.1 The Samburu Practices

The most lived ritual is the initiation or can also be called circumcision. It is the liveliest experience since children are initiated into adulthood with ritual circumcision,

¹⁶⁶ “African Cultural Values,” Available at <http://www.emeka.at/african_cultural_vaules.pdf>.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ “African Cultural Values,” Available at <http://www.emeka.at/african_cultural_vaules.pdf>.

for both boys and girls that create a society of age-sets; for boys, they are marked as a warrior and girls as a grown up woman.¹⁶⁹ With this elaboration of the initiation, it will be difficult for the *Samburus* to accept other teachings of the Bible. The Bible teaches of the different types of the initiation like Baptism, Eucharist et cetera. Though almost all initiation processes are different from one another across the globe, the *Samburus'* way of doing it is totally different.

The *Samburu* marriages are mostly polygamous. It is one of the most patriarchal societies where men have voice more than women. In this case, men are allowed to have more than one wife.¹⁷⁰ In order to relate this to the biblical understanding is a big issue, since the Bible teaches that only a man should marry one wife. According to St. Paul, every man should marry one woman, and one wife for one man: “But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband” (1Cor. 7:2).¹⁷¹ Paul goes on to explain marital responsibilities in terms that make sense only with ‘one’ husband to ‘one’ wife. However, to the *Samburus* it will be a difficult task to understand due to the polygamous inclination.

4.3.4.2.2 Religion and Beliefs

The *Samburu* traditional beliefs are still intact and did not undergo many influences like many African tribes. They believe in a distance creator god called *Nkai* or

¹⁶⁹ KenyaInformationGuide.com, “The Samburu Tribe: Samburus – a kin of the Maasais,” Available at <<http://www.kenya-information-guide.com/samburu-tribe.html>>.

¹⁷⁰ Wikipedia, “Samburu People,” Available at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samburu_people>.

¹⁷¹ Bible, New International Version (NIV): p. 851.

Ngai who lives in mountain peaks.¹⁷² The *Samburu* people take their prayers direct to God, while the diviners foretell the season for fertility and rains. In their religious beliefs, the diviners act like mediators between God and the people. When God is unhappy, he sends diseases, war, death, drought and external attacks. They appease God through sacrifices undertaken in riverbanks, in the mountains and to other specific places. Although a significant percentage of *Samburus* still stick to their traditional beliefs and religion, a small percentage have interacted and have adopted Christianity and Islam. From the understanding that the *Samburu* belief of a god dwells in mountains or on trees, it really rules out the understanding of the God that depicted in the Bible.

4.3.4.3 The Kikuyu Culture

The Bible was written in a certain time based on the tradition and culture of a certain people; some cultures have similar values and others differ. This section will specifically point the areas that *Kikuyu* culture affects the Bible's interpretation positively or negatively.

God as the author of every generation passed on values that when they are truly followed lead generation to prosperity. Thus God instruct and commands that values in cultures be passed on from generation to another. It is believed that *Gikuyu* and *Mumbi* are the first parents in the *Kikuyu* tradition¹⁷³ and can be matched with Adam and Eve in the biblical faith.

¹⁷² Orville Boyd Jenkins, "People Profile: The Samburu," Available at <<http://strategyleader.org/profiles/samburu.html>>.

¹⁷³ MagicalKenya.com, "Kikuyu Culture & Traditions," Available at <<http://old.magicalkenya.com/default.nsf/features1/61C4B46EE07655A64325709A00352ECC?opendocument&l=1>>.

In order to continue passing on values, the first parents might have instructed their children of their belief about where they came from. *Gikuyu* and *Mumbi* were blessed with nine daughters who gave rise to *Kikuyu* community.¹⁷⁴ In Bible, Abraham specifically is commanded to be the father of a great nation and in this culture the dwelling place of God was believed to be in the high grounds (mountains). In *Kikuyu* culture it was believed to be *Kirinyaga* (Mount Kenya) as the dwelling place of their god *Ngai*, the Supreme Creator, the place where from he called forth *Gikuyu* the father of *Kikuyus*,¹⁷⁵ while the Bible says that Moses was commanded to meet God in Mount Sinai in order to be instructed how the Israelites would lead their lives (Gen. 19:20).¹⁷⁶

Both in *Kikuyu* culture and biblical faith marriage serves as an institution that promotes continuation of generation. The commitment in it calls for dedication and sacrifice; parties in it complement each other and calling for an understanding in their relation. This is equated in the New Testament with the love of Christ for the church. In *Kikuyu* culture there were dos and don'ts in this commitment where incest, lesbianism and gay behavior was a taboo just like in the biblical faith. This is what prompted God to order the killing of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Morals in any culture supersede evils and guided by morals generations win favors because this is the way to do things.

In the biblical faith a mediator was used by God to convey a message to the people of Israel. The message they took had prohibition of behavior, message of hope, encouragement, and generally how God wanted them to live and even foretold the punishment if only they did not heed the advice. There is a belief in *Kikuyu* culture about

¹⁷⁴ Ibid

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

a prophet who foretold future events that would affect their life. One of those people believed to have been sent by God in *Kikuyu* culture was a man by the name *Mugo Kibiru* who in his prophesies pointed out the era of colonization. He mentioned of white butterflies that would invade *Kikuyu* land and suppress their progress as a people by overworking them.¹⁷⁷

4.3.4.4. Ethiopian Culture

Ethiopia is a country of varied cultures. Christian and Muslim communities have co-existed in this country peacefully for centuries. It is believed that Prophet Mohammed took refuge in the Christian kings of Ethiopia during his persecution in Southern Arabia. As an obligation, Mohammed exempted Ethiopia from Muslim holy wars. Even the first mosque in Africa was built in Ethiopia in the Tigre province. It is a common practice of Ethiopians that Christians and Muslims visit each other in their worship places to enquire about their well-being.¹⁷⁸ The biblical depiction of “And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Mt. 22:39)¹⁷⁹ will be easily understood in such a culture.

Every ethnic group has its own traditional marriage customs, although some are common. In the Ethiopian culture, arranged marriage is the norm and the elders take the decision. Presenting a dowry from the males’ family to the female’s family is common and it varies depending on the wealth of each family. In most cases, dowry may include

¹⁷⁶ Bible, New International Version (NIV): p. 56.

¹⁷⁷ Wikipedia, “Mugo Kibiru,” Available at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mugo_Kibiru>.

¹⁷⁸ Adam Mohr, “Countries and their Cultures: Ethiopia,” Available at <<http://www.everyculture.com/Cr-Ga/Ethiopia.html>>.

¹⁷⁹ Bible, New International Version (NIV): p. 736.

livestock, money or other items valued socially.¹⁸⁰ This is somewhat similar to the Bible depiction of the marriage of Isaac, son of Abraham. Abraham sends his servant to *Aram Naharaim* with valuable presents for the ‘would be bride’ of his son whom his God would show to his servant (Gen. 24:10).¹⁸¹

The arrangements of Ethiopian marriage begin when elders from the groom’s parents contact the bride’s family for the marriage negotiations, similar to biblical system where the groom’s family visits the bride’s family first. Both families prepare food and drink for the ceremony that includes wine, beer and meat.¹⁸²

4.3.4.5 Egyptian Society and Culture

The majority of Egyptians practice Islam, it also governs their personal, economical, legal and political issues. The present day Saudi Arabia becomes the origin of Islam. The common Islam belief states that Prophet Muhammad was the last prophet sent by God (with same task brought by Jesus, Moses, and Abraham et cetera) to deliver revelation to humanity.¹⁸³ The message he brought belonged to mankind and not certain particular group, this makes him distinguished. Just like Moses who brought the Torah and Jesus who brought the Bible, Muhammad brought the *Quran*. In the religion, the

¹⁸⁰ Adam Mohr, “Countries and their Cultures: Ethiopia,” Available at <<http://www.everyculture.com/Cr-Ga/Ethiopia.html>>.

¹⁸¹ Bible, New International Version (NIV): p. 16.

¹⁸² Adam Mohr, “Countries and their Cultures: Ethiopia,” Available at <<http://www.everyculture.com/Cr-Ga/Ethiopia.html>>.

¹⁸³ The Big Myth, “Egyptian Culture,” Available at <http://www.bigmyth.com/download/EGYPTIAN_CULTURE.pdf>.

Quran and *Sunnah* (the actions of the Prophet) take center stage as the basis for all guidance in the religion.¹⁸⁴

However, the Egyptians, like their counterparts throughout the world, seem to have thought that God was too great and too remote to concern himself with the daily problems of men. Instead, He committed the management of the world to a series of gods or spirits whom people needed to worship and propitiate. Many gods were worshipped and served. *Atum* (or *Tem*) was the oldest of the gods. He was called, ‘the self-created’, ‘the maker of the gods’, and ‘the creator of men’. His centre of worship was Heliopolis. According to legend, god *Shu* and goddess *Tefnut* was the created by *Atum*.¹⁸⁵

The cult of the dead goes back to the beginning of the Old Stone Age. In Egypt, a funeral cult developed in order to provide the needs for the dead king in the after-life. Items such as cloths, food, furniture and even jewelry were buried with the king. Providing for the dead king was essential for the well-being of the nation and the process of gaining everlasting life for the deceased king.¹⁸⁶ This means, in the ancient belief of Egyptians about the dead and their after life there was no role of any divine intervention. This is contrary to the biblical teaching of eternal life; Bible says, ““I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life”” (Jn. 5:24).¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Kwintessential.co.uk, “Egypt - Language, Culture, Customs and Etiquette,” Available at <<http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/egypt-country-profile.html>>.

¹⁸⁵ Wikipedia, “Atum,” Available at <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atum>>.

¹⁸⁶ Wikipedia, “Ancient Egyptian Burial Customs,” Available at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Egyptian_burial_customs>.

¹⁸⁷ Bible, New International Version (NIV): p. 793.

The priests of all the Egyptian cities claimed absolute sovereignty for their own gods, and thus developed polytheism along side of monotheism. Divinities proliferated in addition to the belief in the Supreme Being.¹⁸⁸

The texts in the Book of the Dead deal primarily with the kings, priests and other officials dating back as far as 4,000 BC. The greatest attention was devoted to the proper rituals required by the deceased kings. However, the ordinary Egyptians did observe various ceremonies meant to ensure the safe passage of their own dead to the other world. In the present day, Islam and Coptic Christians have some common practices like burying the dead on the same day. They believe in soul distinguishing it from other non-corporeal aspects of the person.¹⁸⁹

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

This chapter will provide general discussions in regard to use of culture in interpretation of the Bible.

5.1 Analysis Level I

This is the heart of the study because the researcher consolidated all the research findings to address the main theme. It is worth reminding the reader that this was purely a philosophical enquiry as compared to theological one. This is because the researcher sought to understand through philosophical investigation what exactly is in different cultures that would make it easy or hard to interpret the Scripture or the Word of God for

¹⁸⁸ Nicholas S. Hopkins and Reem Saad, "Countries and Their Cultures: Egypt," Available at <<http://www.everyculture.com/Cr-Ga/Egypt.html>>.

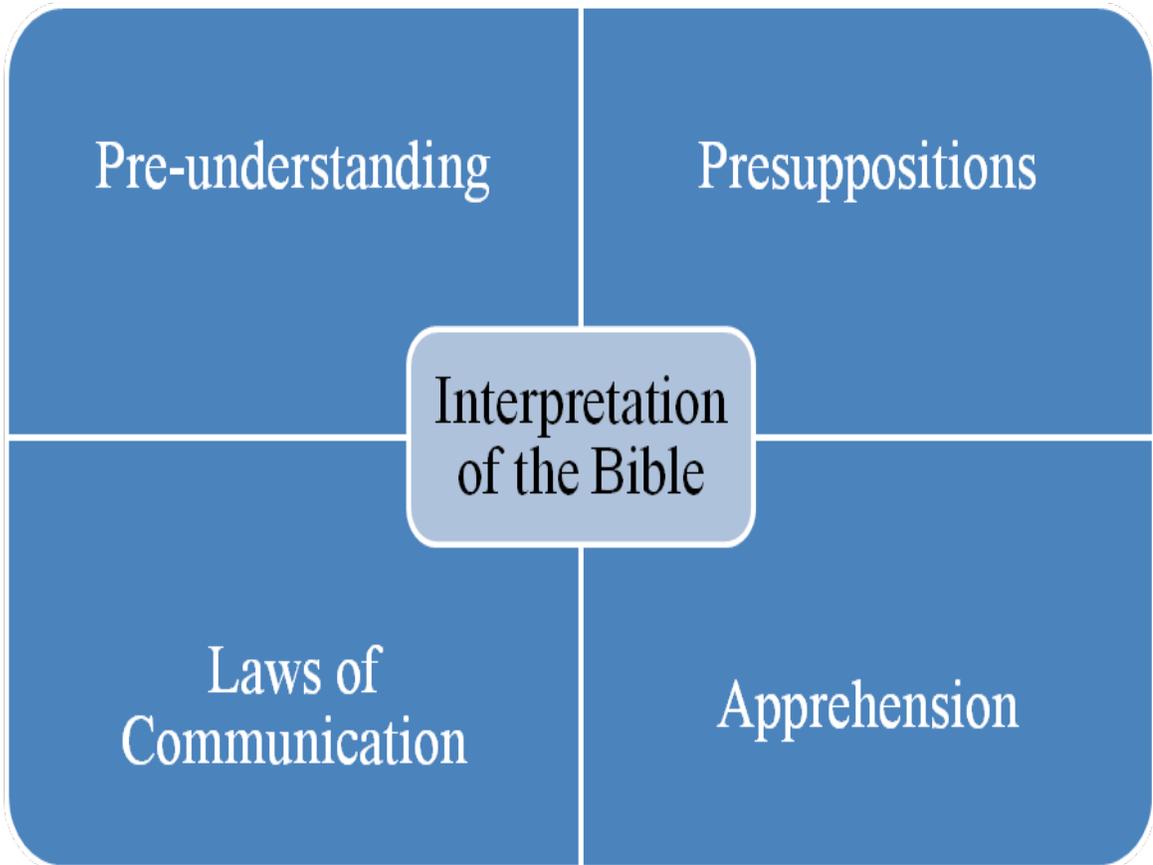
¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

that matter. Therefore, in this section the study focused on each and every essential point in the main research and through critical analysis presents its relevance to the study. The purpose of the study sought to understand the different ways culture has contributed or suppressed proper interpretation of the Bible by focusing on Western, Asian, and African cultures.

Now we recall the research questions mentioned in Section in 1.4 and research objectives mentioned in Section 1.5.

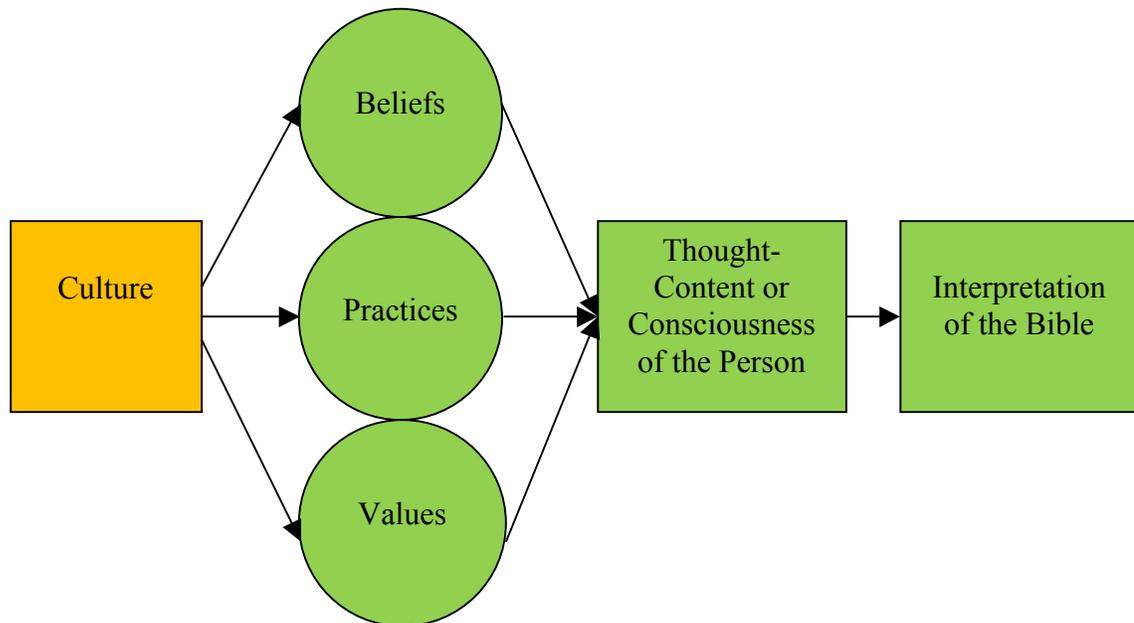
In the literature review it was demonstrated that there are issues that influence how people interpret or understand the Scripture namely, pre-understanding, presuppositions, laws of communication, and apprehension. The analysis went ahead to demonstrate that pre-understanding refers to what people apprehend or take within their belief before they get to read the Bible. This may be demonstrated in figure 5.1 below.

Figure 5.1: A Model of the Issues that Influence How People Interpret the Bible (Source: developed by Author)



The most impressive point is, in the analysis it was argued that pre-understanding serves as a pair of glasses that people perceive everything. The main idea was that if the glasses were red then the reality would also seem reddish. Here, the researcher will go back to the conceptual framework especially the proposed model. Therefore, consider the following presentation and hopefully the reader will not get confused but rather grasp the main point.

Figure 5.2: Deeper Analysis on the Conceptual Framework
(Source: developed by Author)



After transforming the outlook of the model in figure 1.1, it takes the second outlook in figure 5.2 above. Though the two figures look same, the idea in this case is the color given to or quality for beliefs, practices and values become the same for thought-content or consciousness and lastly the same becomes the essence for the interpretation of the Bible. It means, therefore, the three share similar qualities where such has been demonstrated by use of similar color. This is exactly what the researcher intended to demonstrate in respect to showing the degree to which culture would impact on interpretation of the Bible. It is worth mentioning that this development was inspired by the arguments advanced in the literature review in as far as how culture influences the interpretation of the Bible is concerned. Precisely the debate on pre-understanding discussed in the literature review carries a lot of richness in addressing this concern.

People perceive everything through their pre-understanding. Literally translated it would mean that people of God interpret the Bible through the dynamics of their culture. However, another point was put across on whether pre-understanding does impede objectivity. This is the same as asking whether culture impedes objectivity and in this case interpretation of the Bible. This is a critical issue and the most essential thing is to also understand what objectivity actually means. This was already presented in the section for the definition of terms. However, objectivity is nothing but the ability of the person to view reality without prejudice or bias.

It is arguably so that there are certain aspects of culture that may be regarded as objective; all the same culture in and of itself is a prejudice. In this regard, it means culture may prevent the individual to have an objective approach while interpreting the Bible. This is just a point of caution since there is still room to argue that culture can have objective factors hence making the person interpret the Bible with objective lens.

Another issue established in the literature review was the fact that people from different cultural backgrounds relate to the Scripture in light of their pre-understanding. By the way it is critical noting that pre-understanding and culture have one and the same connotation and in this study they have been treated as interchangeable concepts. Therefore, the whole literature on pre-understanding can equivalently be used to deepen more on culture. In fact, the researcher mentioned about the concept of worldview to connote the manner in which people look at the world. The bottom line is that worldview is also another way to look at culture and its dynamics.

It was important to deepen more understanding in regard to the extent to which culture would annihilate possibility for absolute truth when interpreting the Bible. First of

all, it was mentioned earlier that culture is in itself a prejudice but that does not mean that the same cannot be objective. Therefore, the researcher believes that cultural practices and beliefs would prevent its subjects to comprehend absolute truths in the Bible if, and only if, one uses the prejudice. For instance, where a person takes a prejudice of culture from his community then the implication would deter him from appreciating the objectivity of the particular text he reads in the Bible.

The other investigation would be to understand how culture would be supporting hermeneutics. Well, the truth of the matter is that there may be wide gaps between the culture as depicted in some of the situations in the Bible and the ways people see life today. However, since hermeneutics is the study of the Word of God from its very context, then culture would add value only if the situation at hand has any relevance to the reader's culture. This is because that would enhance curiosity not to mention the ease to understand even in deeper extent what that particular text intends to pass across. For instance, it could be that, in a given Bible study session the participants are discussing about family values as depicted in the Bible. May be they are reading about the role of children towards their parents. Assuming they come from a culture that emphasizes on respect for parents then they would be in a position to understand this scriptural text without much difficulty and even analyze from its very context.

Well, the study discussed about the main rules specific to interpretation of the Bible. This may not have had direct relevance to the main investigation. However, the reader may still think of the following:

Would culture ensure interpretation of the Bible in harmony or through the guidance of the Holy Spirit?

That said the next analysis would look at some of the issues discussed above under the section talking about key themes in the Bible. The aim is to revisit each of them again and show how they relate to culture. In the same vein it will show how such interconnection may be used to affirm or negate that culture can be instrumental when it comes to interpretation of the Bible.

5.2 Analysis Level II

One of the issues addressed in the study was the problem of evil. This was demonstrated when the researcher was looking at the different themes in the Bible. Therefore, at this juncture the aim is to assess the degree to which different cultures comprehend as well as address the problem of evil. By and large the Scripture articulates on evil as something deriving from man himself. It was stated the issue of evil as a result of human wickedness. We have discussed many issues on the themes of the Bible; however, in this analysis the researcher focused on the following themes:

1. The Problem of Evil
2. Redemption
3. Faith
4. Doubles and Opposites
5. The Good Samaritan
6. Final Judgment and Future Hope

In looking at the levels of cultures the researcher believes that the stage characterized by learned behavior pattern and acumen may be a great barrier for the possibility for harmonization of cultures and the Scripture. This is because the Word of

God itself would sometime reflect a certain culture that time and the readers may have a problem identifying with the text. In other words, texts in the Bible linked to cultural values of a people during the time it was developed, may not be acceptable to a modern leader simply because he failed to identify with the said culture. This in turn would impede the person to not only interpret the Bible accurately but also lose interest on what he reads in the first place. Still, under the analysis of levels of culture developed in the literature review it is arguably so that there are communities that remain steadfast in their cultural traditions what the reader refers to as ‘cultural fundamentalism’. Christians who celebrate *Onam* and start education as part of *Durga Puja* mentioned in Section 4.3.3.4 are good examples of such fundamentalists. This aspect of cultural fundamentalism would be an impediment to the interpretation of the Bible because it would be very difficult to integrate a text in the Bible within a particular cultural set up. This is what the researcher may term as cultural conflict. In general, cultural conflict is what makes contemporary societies have difficulties interpreting the Bible for the simple reason that they do not manage to internalize the Scripture text developed in a given cultural setting.

The researcher also refers the reader to the understanding of the elements of culture discussed in the literature review. Well, the main issues would revolve around cultural conflict and cultural internalization. This is because a deeper look at the elements of culture namely social organization, customs and traditions, religion and forms of government just to mention a few, will demonstrate that they end up as a pre-understanding. Earlier on, the researcher gave a deeper reflection on the relationship between culture and pre-understanding; in fact, it was simply stated that culture actually becomes the pre-understanding or consciousness of the person. This is exactly the

platform one would use to address the different ways the elements of culture as put in the literature review impede or enhance interpretation of the Bible.

Going back to the main themes of the Bible it was seen that one of them is the understanding of evil. However, it can be argued that different communities understand the issue of evil from diverse perspectives. There are those cultures that perceive it as a punishment for man due to his wrongful acts. On the other hand, there are cultures that would see evil as something deriving from a different world. This means the latter case would constitute a culture that believes evil is not for them but that it is occasioned by other calamities or realities. As can be seen the latter case would have a problem interpreting evil as presented in the Bible especially where they believe it derives from a different world.

This is the same case with the issue of redemption because there are cultures in which people believe that they have to perform some rituals to appease the 'living dead' or ancestors for salvation. However, the critical point worth noting is that there are cultures that would have a difficulty in interpreting fully the validity of hoping for Divine intervention for their redemption.

On the issue of the Good Samaritan it would best be discussed under the aspects of good neighborhood and the kind of relationship in different cultures. There are cultures where people neglect the social commitment and give low reverence to strangers. In fact, children in some cultures are cautioned not to talk to strangers. This would be the challenge inviting such cultures to embrace the teachings of Jesus as portrayed in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. This in turn means they would have a problem internalizing the Good Samaritan in terms of the teachings, not the literal text.

The focus of the researcher when addressing the study was the degree to which people from different cultures would be in a position to internalize the Scripture or grasp the spirit of the word not the letter of the word. For instance, when Jesus said, “I am the bread of Life” one would start arguing why Jesus refers himself as the bread of life and ask questions such as “did people eat him” or “how could Jesus take the form of bread” et cetera. However, the difficult part in interpreting such text is because the reader in his cultural setting literally reads the text but does not internalize the spirit of the word. For instance, read in between the lines and somewhat see that Jesus meant He was the source of life et cetera.

There are a lot of points that could be discussed in this level of analysis but some of the main points have been addressed. Now we will move to the last section of the analysis in this chapter.

5.3 Analysis Level III

The first thing is to present the matrix that used in this article to assess the different cultures already discussed. Therefore, the aim was to identify the cultural issue and then demonstrate how such was manifested in different cultures. Therefore, table 5.1 is a matrix that a person can use to think through while at the same time assess the different ways the identified cultures would interpret the truths therein.

Utmost care is taken in preparing the matrix to include the cultural values or practices from the Old and New Testaments to get an overall coverage of the cultures during the periods.

Table 5.1: Matrix for the Analysis of Culture

Cultural Value/Belief/Practice	Biblical Verse
Love of Family	1 Tim. 5:8
Love of Children	Eph. 6:4; Prov. 22:6
Love of Husband and Wife	1 Pet. 3:7; Col. 3:19
Respect for Parents by Children	Col. 3:20; Prov. 1:8
Believe in one God	Deut. 6:4-5; Mk. 1:24
Prohibition of Polygamy	Mt. 19:3-9; 1 Kings 11:1-3
God as the Provider	Lk. 24:36-39
Love of Neighbor	Lev. 19:18; Mk. 12:31
Trust in God	2 Sam. 7:28; Ps. 9:10
Hope for Afterlife	Jn. 3:16; Rev. 21:6-8
Role of Women	1 Tim. 2:12; 1 Pet. 3:1
Respect for Women	Phil. 4:3; 1 Pet. 3:7
Gender Equality	Gen. 3:16-17; 1 Tim. 2:12
Condemnation of Witchcraft	Lev. 19:31; 2 Kings 17:17
Condemnation of Worshipping Idols	Rom. 1:22-25; Jn. 4:23
God as the only Creator	Gen. 1:1; 2 Pet. 3:13
God as the only Supreme Being	Is. 45:5
Eradication of Homosexuality	Gen. 19:5

This marks the last part of the analysis where the matrix is used, to assess different cultures analyzed in chapter four. However, there will be no need to go into detail in every culture but then relevant thing would be to pick issues that are already contained in the said matrix (refer to Table 5.1).

It was seen that in the Italian culture there is a place for rituals and hold places. This means they would not have a problem when interpreting some phenomena in the Bible that talk about God having a dwelling place. This point is not in the matrix though. Of interest, however, is the place of death and afterlife in the Italian culture since this community believes in eternity of the soul. In the matrix this coincides with Jn. 3:16¹⁹⁰ and Rev. 21:8.¹⁹¹ In the former, the Bible states that the love of God in the world led Him to give His only begotten son to the world so that whoever believed in him would have eternal life. Now, it means the Italians would be in a position to interpret this verse including internalizing or accepting fully the message thereof. This is because they are able to relate the same to their cultural beliefs on death and afterlife. In Rev. 21:8 the verse does not talk much about eternal life in the sense of redemption but rather in that of punishment and condemnation. This can also make sense in the Italian culture since they would not have a problem believing on the possibility for another life whether for happiness or suffering.

In the case of Spain it was seen that their culture allows for equality for both men and women. The subject that respect and honor for women may be seen in Phil. 4:3¹⁹² and 1 Pet. 3:7.¹⁹³ In the former the Scripture affirms need to support women that professed commitment and dedication to the gospel. In the same vein, in the later the husbands are invited to exercise consideration for their wives at the same time respect

¹⁹⁰ Bible, New International Version (NIV): p. 791.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, p. 922.

¹⁹² Ibid, p. 874.

¹⁹³ Ibid, p. 901.

them and uphold their dignity. It is arguably so that some cultures, especially *Samburu* in Kenya would have difficulties interpreting this verse because their culture does not believe their women should have any special place or privileges.

Spain and indeed other cultures discussed in the study advocate for the need of the children to respect their parents at all times. This also refers to the role of the parents towards their children including the overall invitation for love of family. These issues are quite evident in some of the cultures discussed in the study. Col. 3:20¹⁹⁴ states that children ought to obey their parents in whatever they do since such would earn them God's blessings. In Prov. 1:8¹⁹⁵ the Bible verse instructs children to heed to their father's instructions and mother's teachings. In General, in some cultures the aspect of marriage brought out very clearly the issue of love for family, love for children and the commitment of both husband and wife to remain in love and cooperation. For instance, in 1 Tim. 5:8¹⁹⁶ the Bible states that a person that fails to provide for his family will have failed in his faith. Eph. 6:4¹⁹⁷ directs that fathers should be there for their children and care them in light of God's teachings. In Col. 3:19¹⁹⁸ it directs that husbands should always love their wives and not to be harsh with them. Indeed, all these are clear statements in the Bible that gear towards value of marriage. This means cultures that uphold marriage values, as Spain's culture may not have problems with putting into practice the teachings stated above from the Bible.

¹⁹⁴ Bible, New International Version (NIV): p. 877.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 472.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 883.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 872.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 877.

In light of the analysis done on Western culture especially UK and U.S. there were key issues that came out, for instance, moral liberalism/pragmatism and individualism. Actually, in US, homosexuality is recognized de facto and de jure. The reader can think of feminism, fight for gay rights, euthanasia, divorce and abortion that prevail there in US. In the case of homosexuality the Bible says in Gen. 18:20-21 and Gen. 19:5¹⁹⁹ that the Lord brought down Sodom and Gomorrah due to their sexually immoral acts. This clearly would not be upheld in the Western culture where homosexuality is a legal right. As in, they would have a difficulty in interpreting this biblical state of affairs.

In Buddhism, which was addressed as a prejudice for Indian Christian cultures does not believe a Supreme Being or in the power of prayers; in fact, it was stated that this way of life believes in the ability of the person and not God. It is also true that some Indian community by virtue of denouncing Buddhism for the sake of Christianity resolve to also let go of the beliefs. However, this paper will just argue for the sake of pedagogical reasons or so as to demonstrate how Christians suffering prejudices from Buddhism that would interpret certain issues in the Bible. It is evident that in the matrix, belief in one God, God as the provider, and trust in God alone are among the issues that would not be upheld in Buddhist-affected cultures. Also, the Christians who follow Hindu traditions as part of culture, knowingly or unknowingly reject the biblical teaching of monotheism.

¹⁹⁹ Bible, New International Version (NIV): p. 12 and p. 13.

One thing that can be said is that the Bible condemns worshipping of idols and it seems India is one region where the same is greatly practiced. In Rom. 1:25,²⁰⁰ the Bible emphasizes that only God and not any other things are to be worshiped.

When looking at the issue of polygamy it was evidenced that overall African traditions permit polygamy. This is evident in the *Samburu* culture. Therefore, this aspect would create difficulties when attempting to interpret the sanctity of monogamy as directed in the Bible. All in all, African cultures discussed in the study have deep reverence for a Supreme Being especially *Kikuyu* culture including regarding him as the Creator.

That said the study proceeds to the last chapter where the main ideas will be summarized, make few recommendations, and address issues that would require more exploration in future research.

²⁰⁰ Bible, New International Version (NIV): p. 837.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion it can be said that the current thesis achieved its main objectives whereby it demonstrated the different ways culture impacts on the interpretation of the Bible. The researcher was also categorical that by interpretation it meant the degree to which different communities were in a position to comprehend and put into practice the text as presented in the Bible. In this regard, this was not a hermeneutic process but rather a review of the ability of the people of God to understand and internalize the Word of God as presented to them. It was quite an enrichment to conduct the research and there can be no doubt that the reader benefited upon reading the study. Indeed, the researcher endeavored to make clear the phenomenological connections between the Bible and cultural issues and see whether they collide or reinforce one another. This means the analysis is clear, succinct and elaborate. All the same as suggested in the topic theme in the current chapter there would still be room for improvement hence the need for future research.

The fundamental point is that culture may impact on the interpretation of the Bible in different perspectives. In the conceptual framework where the same was brought into the picture in the literature review when talking about pre-understanding it was seen that communities have certain prejudices that translate into their consciousness or thought-content. A good example referred to the manner in which pre-understanding, for instance, serves as glasses through which a subject would view the reality. The bottom line was that where if the glasses were red then the person would view reality as reddish. This was the similar argument in the conceptual framework when the researcher

demonstrated the psychological process of cultural assimilation and implementation. In the literature review the key themes included are Bible interpretation, culture and the culture and interpretation of biblical truths. These evaluations were critical to the study because they gave the researcher a good platform for the analysis. Indeed, the reader could not relate culture and interpretation of the Bible if in the first place; he could not define or elaborate on each concept. That is why it was inevitable to address the topics as ends in themselves and eventually merge the ideas in light of the research objectives.

The other critical issue is the fact that the study managed to demonstrate how culture influences interpretation of the Bible; however, this was achieved through critical analysis again using the matrix provided. There were thorough reviews of different cultures where the case studies established certain beliefs, customs and practices and how the same would have contributed to the interpretation of the Bible. It is important to restate that the study aimed to establish how interpretation of the Bible would have been led to effective interpretation of the Bible and besides the implementation of the Word of God. Therefore, the current analysis posed serious concerns in as far as evangelization of the word is concerned. This is because it was found out how culture per se may add value to the process of evangelization of the word to the people of God. The main findings demonstrated that culture may positively or negatively impact on the interpretation of the Bible.

In some cultures like especially in the Asian region it was seen that belief in a Supreme Being, trust in God and worshipping of idols had its own challenges. Bottom line is that cultures in the said regions do not believe in a Supreme Being and there is a lot of superstition and idol worshipping. Thus, the researcher argued that it would very

difficult to have such cultures interpret certain teachings in the Bible and put them into practice. Another aspect was in *Samburu* culture when it was retorted that they would not interpret easily the sense of monogamy since this community sees no better value in monogamy; rather they perceive that polygamy is the better way of family life. There are many issues that may be pointed out here but just need a few for the conclusion.

It can be seen from the Bible that the disciples of Christ have not turned their face to culture prevalent at their time; they gave due respect to the culture, provided it was not against the Scriptures. We read in Acts as said by James, as the main decision of the Council of Jerusalem: “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood” (Acts 15:19-20).²⁰¹ The disciples, as inspired by the Holy Spirit, never wanted to interfere in the cultural aspects of Gentiles that did not contradict with the Word of God, on their embracing Christianity. This is an important point to be noted by evangelizers while the Word of God is preached or taught.

In terms of future research the only effort would be to turn this analysis into a primary research. Therefore, future researchers can adopt qualitative or quantitative research methods to address the same objectives and investigations. This will mean going to the real situation for the said cultures and assessing the main issues that prevent them from grasping the real teachings of the Word of God. Moreover, have a real discussion

²⁰¹ Bible, New International Version (NIV): p. 823 and p. 824.

and sharing with a selected sample it would constitute a thorough presentation of the ideas and feedback to the main investigation.

Recommendations would be as follows:

1. Future scholars can take the current study and do a primary research to confirm its findings. Therefore, this may be a library resource that would provide a theoretical framework for further studies on the same.
2. The people of God, during their evangelizing effort, should ensure that they understand the cultures of the people they seek to preach to; thus, they can deliver the message in the Scripture effectively to those who are ignorant about it. Otherwise, it will be as said in Proverbs: “As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his folly” (Prov. 26:11)²⁰² and the Word of God will never be accepted.

²⁰² Bible, New International Version (NIV): p. 492.

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