Introduction

WHY THIS STUDY?

The Bible and Politics—The Experience of the Caribbean

The thesis of this book is based on our reading of the New Testament in general and of Romans in particular, which is as a result of our social and cultural location as a Caribbean people. In fact the historical, religious, and political experience of the Caribbean cannot be divorced from European, British, and American hegemony and imperialism, which, in the language of the colonizers, were always a legitimate off-shoot of their mandate to Christianize the "New World." The political conquest (conquest and not discovery—the lands of the Caribbean and the Americas were never lost except in the eyes of European imperialism, who discovered the opportunity for exploitation of human and natural resources) of the Americas by the Spanish and the British in the fifteenth century demonstrates that the link between politics and theology was still very much the way of ordering life. The history of the Caribbean and the Americas is way beyond the scope of this study, but suffice it to say that it was the Roman Catholic Church that not only gave the green light to settlement, but also authorized the enslavement of the indigenous population and Africans to serve the purpose of exploitation and imperialism. Notwithstanding, many Anglican clergy either owned slaves, or by deferment to their dependency on the white plantocracy, justified the institution of slavery by appealing to the Bible. One could call to mind the work of Eric Williams, Elsa Goveia, Michael Manley, Walter Rodney, and Hilary Beckles in outlining the historical realities of this period and the role of the church in this critical period.[1]

1. The seminal works by these authors that created the critique on European colonisation and the complicity of the established religious structures continue to inform the Caribbean worldview to a large extent. These leaders have left legacies in their own right, and have set the foundation by which the critique of domination, particularly European and British ideology and the implicit role of religion, have remained foremost in the minds of Caribbean scholars. Of the literary legacies, acknowledgment is due to Williams, *British Capitalism*, and Williams, *From Columbus*; Rodney, *How Europe*; and Beckles & Shepherd, *Caribbean*; and Beckles, *European Settlement*. The impact on the emerging theology of Caribbean scholars and church has been realised in deep soul-searching and the reaffirmation of the

More recently, Noel F. Titus has brought to light what he calls the conflicts and contradictions between the profession and praxis of the Roman Church. In his book *Conflicts and Contradictions: The Introduction of Christianity to the Sixteenth-Century Caribbean*,[2] Titus undertook a critical appraisal of Spanish politics and religion in the sixteenth century. He paid particular attention to the relationship between the Spanish monarchy and the papacy and their roles in the subsequent colonization of what for Europe was conveniently called "the New World." Titus' assessment shone light on the conflicts and contradictions between the profession and practice of the Roman Catholic Church, particularly in the theological rationalization and legitimization of slavery, using biblical texts (Gen 9:18–27, and Eph 5:6–8) to support their political ideology. The missionary activity was therefore nothing more than the forceful indoctrination of the indigenous and African peoples, under the guise of Christian theology, to a European worldview and ideology that had as its major thrust political domination. Scripture was able to sustain Spanish notions of ethnic superiority that were at the basis of acculturation, militarization and conquest, which led to uncivil criminal abuses of the indigenous populations. Enslavement was rationalized by the dominant culture as the price to pay by the Africans for their Christianizing by the Europeans and Spanish.

Another Barbadian scholar has taken issue with the Anglican Church in Barbados and arrived at very similar conclusions albeit at a much later date. Kortright Davis[3] demonstrated that the church, under the control of the white English plantocracy, became the ideological instrument by which the social disparity between the dominant white capital owners and the poor black working class was maintained, while ensuring that rebellion was controlled. *Cross and Crown*, Kortright's metaphorical reference of Church (the Anglican Church in particular), and the British monarchy, together created peace and poverty. The established Anglican Church was effective in pursuing a policy of social containment and maintaining a web of dependence which the plantation ethic produced. It was Bishop John Mitchinson who sought to effect changes for the betterment of the working class, albeit in the face of frustration from fellow clergy who sought to protect the status quo.

Recently, Dirk K. Smit, speaking from an African-American perspective and implicitly a position of subordination that is appreciated by scholars from the Caribbean and perhaps the Third World, and in particular scholars of African origin, wrote: "And, particularly in the black Churches, we have become very sensitive to, no, suspicious of, the power of language, of discourses, public and religious. We have been on the receiving end too long to ignore all of that. We believe that ideology is the use of ideas as weapons in a social conflict. And we know that these ideas do not fall from

potpourri of local cultures, pan-Africanism being one such outcome. The religious-political impact of this reaffirmation is for the prominence of the denunciation of imperialism in any form, with a commitment to the establishment of systems of justice.

2. Titus, *Conflicts and Contradictions*.

3. Davis, *Cross and Crown*.

the sky, but are embedded in language."[4] What Smit has demonstrated is that theology, ideology and politics are inseparable, and that dominant structures will not hesitate to use religion as a "weapon" of dominance. Ideas of the divine—call them revelation—that originally sought to order human life in a given historical context, have been consistently lifted out of those contexts, usurping the original intention, in order to rationalize, legitimize, and universalize the political and socio-economic power structures of the dominant. Katie Geneva Cannon also wrote a compelling article on the "mythologizing processes that served as the foundational underpinnings for slave ideology in relation to White Christian life, [which were part of] the ideological hegemony of the past."[5] These myths propagated "the inherent inferiority of Black people"[6] and by the authoritative interpretation of the Bible "to support the existing patterns of [their] exploitation . . . Wealthy slaveholders . . . used revenue from slave labor to pay pastors, maintain church properties, support seminaries, and sustain overseas missions. Seduced by privilege and profit, White Christians of all economic strata were made, in effect, coconspirators in the victimization of Black people."[7]

Writing from the inside of the dominant American class structure, Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence have engaged with the theological assumptions of some aspects of contemporary American Christian interpretation. They have contended with what has been described as American Civil Religion, and its interaction with and contribution to contemporary American zealous nationalism and prophetic realism of the politics of the Neo-Conservatives. In addition to the impact on American internal fiscal and foreign policy, they have shown how this political ideology not only compares with Islamic *Jihad* and Israel's militancy, but how Scripture has been used to legitimate the strands of violence found in their policies.[8] Likewise, Michael Prior, writing from his social location in post-colonial Britain, has shown how the Bible has been used to support what he calls the "barbaric behaviour" of colonizers over the past 2,000 years.[9] These imperial ideologies saw the decimation of the indigenous South American people, the rise of apartheid in South Africa, the degradation of the people of Palestine, and the entrenchment of political Zionism culminating with the formation of the state of Israel. In all these cases, justification for colonial hegemony was to be found particularly in the appeal to the pre-conquest and settlement narratives of the Israelites.[10] Prior ably highlighted the challenges and historical aberrations of the ideology of the foundational Exodus narrative that was used to justify occupation of the land of Canaan, and by extension showed how dependence on this narrative to justify the occupation of land by western colonizers

4. Smit, "Theology as Rhetoric?" in Porter and Olbricht, *Rhetoric*, 393–422, esp. 397. See also Gottlieb, "Religion" in *Vergil's Aeneid*, 21–36, esp. 31–32 for the inseparability of Roman politics and religion.

5. Cannon, "Slave Ideology," in Jobling, Pippin, and Schleifer *Postmodern Bible*, 195–204, citing 202.

6. Ibid., 203.

7. Ibid.

8. Jewett and Lawrence, *Captain America*.

9. Prior, *The Bible*, 287.

10. Ibid., 48–215.

can only be considered as morally lacking and deplorably falling beneath the standard of acceptable human behavior.[11] The question is and the assumption has been thus far, that politics and religion are inextricably tied together. But can this premise be supported for Paul's letter to the Romans?

Politics in the Old Testament—A Brief Overview

From a Caribbean perspective, it is difficult not to seek further for the relationship between the theological meaning and the political context of a text. Our history has led us to suspect the over-spiritualising of theological and biblical texts as tools for the ordering of life, and to look for the on-the-ground connections between a text and community. This connection is evident from any reading of the salvation-history of the people of Israel as seen from a biblical and theological perspective. The genesis of the nation is linked to the religious experience of the patriarch, Abraham, and his decision to leave behind his kindred and nation in pursuit of the promise revealed to him, a promise of land that became the bedrock, one of the fundamental pillars of the ideology of the people of Israel. The story of Abraham and his descendants passes through the period of enslavement under the Egyptians; the divine intervention in the laments of hardship and the people's subsequent miraculous departure; the fulfillment of the promise through the inheritance of the land; the political interaction with the inhabitants of that land; the progression of political systems of leadership from judges to kingship, from individual tribes to a consolidated confederacy under David; the ascent to be a super-power in their own right and the eventual demise of the nation under successive dominant imperial regimes; Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Medes, Greece, Egypt, and in the New Testament era, Rome.

Throughout the Bible, the concern is with the relationship of people with each other and with God, with the lived political realities of life in the land, and with the divine corrective measures perceived to correct imbalances in these relationships; corrective measures that involved the internal and external political struggles of the people, particularly the surrounding nations. Various institutions and groups employed contextual devices to deal with the problem; the Judges saw repentance and removal of offence as critical; the Deuteronomist linked effect to cause, a divinely ordained system of retribution and reward; the Wisdom tradition maintained that the Deuteronomist view was faulted by the fact that the outcomes of reward and retribution did not stand up to the scrutiny of experience; the zealots sought to take matters into their own hands and fight holy wars; and the apocalyptic mind was convinced that God would once more intervene and restore balance to a politically unstable world. Whatever the situation, the people of Israel saw a link between the divine and the lived political realities of their world; how that link was expressed was dependent upon the worldview at the time, and the various confluences of thought, whether Persian dualism or Hellenistic philosophy, that were prominent at the time.

11. Ibid., 294.

Uncovering a Trend

The picture that emerges here is one in which, leading up to the New Testament era, in the 1200–1500 formative and evolving years of the politics of Israel, we see in a very summary form how ideas of the divine or revelation not only informed the theological perspective of the political status of the nation, but also became the basis on which crucial decisions were made. We have decided to skip over the New Testament era to examine the context of the Caribbean 1500 years after the defining event for New Testament formation—the birth of Christ. We have travelled another 500 years to examine the responses, albeit in brief, of Dirk Smit and Robert Jewett to recognize that the application of biblical theology found and still finds relevance in political decision-making. What this leads to is the premise, nay, the fact that the New Testament and its exegesis cannot be devoid of implications for and interactions with the politics of its own day. Early New Testament narratives clearly demonstrate the tension between religious claims and political and national expectations.[12]

In Barbados the 1960s provided the backdrop for breaking the complicity between imperial dominance that was traditionally legitimized by religion and politics. That was the time of the struggles of Errol Walton Barrow as he fought for independence for Barbados from imperial England, which was attained on November 30, 1966.[13] Errol Barrow, who gained the sobriquet "The Father of Independence," has left a legacy of Barbadian nationalism, for his ideology was to move a people from a mendicant, dependent community, mainly neglected (except on the odd occasion when there was something to be gained), from British imperialism to the self-actualization of independence and nationalism. Errol Barrow worked alongside

12. Paul witnessed and approved the stoning of Stephen, an incident that is deeply embedded in the religious and theological assumptions of Israel. Acts 7:1–8: Stephen recalls the political life of Israel, starting with the call of Abraham from Mesopotamia to a new life, through the patriarchs, and into Egypt, Acts 7:2–17. Moses' first act of deliverance is on an individual scale, against an Egyptian who oppressed another kinsman. According to Stephen, Moses' action of deposing the dominant Egyptian was to serve as a model of rescue for the people from Egyptian domination (Acts 7:23–29), but he was misunderstood and rejected as a self-appointed ruler (Acts 7:27, 35), judge (Acts 7:27, 35), liberator (Acts 7:35), and prophet (Acts 7:37), in the same way that Jesus was rejected and crucified (Acts 7:52b). Stephen draws attention to the settlement of the land through God's act of dispossessing its inhabitants on one hand (Acts 7:45) and the loss of the land through disobedience namely idolatry (Acts 7:41–42) on the other (Acts 7:43). In the idolatry of the people of Israel, God hands them over (Acts 7:42) to worship the hosts of heaven (cf. Deut 32:8–9 and how the Song of Moses functions as a backdrop of Rom 9–11). Implicit in this speech is the notion of national restoration if obedience to the Messiah is pursued, and true worship of God is restored. The speech is not involved with speculative wisdom; Stephen wrestles with the political liberation motif and national sovereignty as promised by God, but does so in a context of conflict and contradiction where both of these (Israel's liberation and national sovereignty) are held in tension.

13. A speech entitled "Land Rights, Conservatism and the Church: Address to Parliament 23 June, 1964 on the Acquisition of Land for the Establishment of the Cave Hill Campus of the University of the West Indies (UWI)," in Haniff, *Speeches*, 58–64 shows the devolution of the relationship between church and state. Another speech "This is the Parting of the Ways," 65–82, in the same volume laid the way for independence by implicitly demonstrating how a dominant ideology can suppress another civilization and the effects it can have on a people thus suppressed. The same is true about biblical criticism. The language of the Bible is the language of the marginalized.

other Caribbean leaders like Dr. Eric Williams of Trinidad and Tobago, Fidel Castro of Cuba, Forbes Burnham of Guyana, and Norman Manley of Jamaica. These leaders in their own way ushered the break with colonialism in their respective territories, and through them the Caribbean Common Market (Caricom) came into being. It is an ideology that has been sustained and expressed in the thinking of great Caribbean personalities, leaders, writers, and scholars alike; Elsa Goveia, William Demas, Forbes Burnham, Hilary Beckles, Sir Shridath Ramphal, George Lamming, Austin (Tom) Clarke, Fidel Castro, to name a few.

It was the historical genius of some of these leaders that uncovered and still continues to uncover the use, misuse, and abuse of theological claims by imperial Britain and Europe to further the process of colonialization in the fifteenth century and following. These caused us to question longstanding presuppositions of power, race, and culture, and created in Caribbean leaders, both political and religious, a thirst for identity apart from that imperialism. These writers created the discourse of the Caribbean as a valid and tangible expression of human dignity and indeed of Christian charity. It is from this perspective that the hermeneutic and discourse of imperialism and colonialism in all forms whether present or past are to be regarded with suspicion. This is particularly of importance when the stated goals and objectives of imperialist discourse on power, equity, justice, fairness, righteousness, etc., are diametrically opposed to their practice. From the Black perspective, one only has to compare the imperial rhetoric of liberation and freedom with the way in which ethnic minorities—particularly Blacks but also Hispanics, and Muslims of all ethnicities—are treated within the pale of these imperialist powers. We are painfully aware that this dichotomy is oftentimes, and for good reason, far removed from the machinations of the public propaganda and discourse of the dominant. It is this equivocation that informs the ideological and theological perspective of this exegete, bearing in mind that the same equivocation is at work in imperialist academia.

The experience of life in the Caribbean is such that it gives rise to three responses. Firstly, it provoked the need to reassess the American/European model of exegesis that seeks to implant its own dominance and safeguard its own political interests; secondly, it stimulated the urge to look deeper into the text for the political and religious ideologies at work there, i.e., for the strands of imperialist discourse and the response of the colonized to this hegemony; and thirdly, to see how these could be overlooked by a culture in favor of modes of existence and expression that conform to and confirm the discourse of the exegete operating from within a dominant structure, particularly if they go against the grain of their exegetical norms and traditions.[14]

14. Felder, *Stony the Road*, presents the challenges of African-Americans in establishing a credible exegetical narrative dynamic of the New Testament, particularly how academia in the dominant imperial context rejects this discourse. See particularly Winbush, "The Bible," 81–97. West and Dube, *The Bible in Africa* presents the picture from the perspective of continental Africa.

METHODOLOGY

Our reading of Romans is "ideological" in keeping with the spectrum of definitions ascribed to the word; it is neutral and it is critical; it is descriptive and it is pejorative. It looks at the historical, the political, the social, and the cultural for ways in which meaning is established and legitimized in the concrete existence of groups irrespective of their definitive boundaries. Because of this, we do not stick slavishly to only one particular method of discourse, but rather we interweave and draw on existing methods of discourse to establish our position. To a large extent the historical-critical discourse dominates our study, and that is as a result of the presupposition that the texts of a particular group within a given context illuminate the discourse of power within that group on the one hand, and offers a basis for critique of power relationships between conflicting groups on the other hand.

For us, the Scripture of Israel—whether Hebrew or Greek—is the major formative source of Paul's understanding of history; they represent the history of the people of God, the people of Israel, and their political and national struggles. They account for their actual existence inside and outside of the land, and catalogue the threats to this existence as stated in the primordial promise of territorial occupation. The Old Testament for Paul is historical, but at the same time it is theological. It is the primary source of his ideas of the respective relationships between Israel, God, and the nations of the world. For this reason, the situation-in-life and the situation-in-literature of Paul's scriptural quotations must be thoroughly examined in order to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the rhetorical contours of his argument. But if the Bible represents the history of the world and specifically those people who are "beloved of God," for Paul, Rome—the dominant political power and imperial master of Israel—also had its legitimating historical text; the *Aeneid*. The major presupposition of our reading is that the power relationships inscribed in both these texts gave rise to the major political, social, economical, and cultural conflicts of Paul's day.

This emphasis on the historical therefore requires that consideration be given to the social-scientific discourse inscribed in the texts as an integral part of determining the theology that springs from the context. Power relations give rise to levels of hierarchy in competing groups. The texts of the dominant characterize how power is legitimized and imposed on the subordinate, while the texts of the subordinate will seek actively or passively to refute those claims, to critique and offer resistance to the notions of dominance. The dominant as a result will seek ways to curtail and to police the activity of the subordinate, and the text of the subordinate must take into account these constraints. It is from this perspective that the tools of social anthropology can help us understand the theology of a subordinate group. Consideration is to be given to the ordering of social relationships in context; for example, to the functioning of binary oppositional motifs such as honor and shame; to the hierarchical structure of relationships such as patron and client. The historical discourse therefore must be illuminated by the social-scientific discourse.

In addition, especially in antiquity, when we recognize that religion often acted as the legitimizing agent of politics and the quest for dominance, consideration must be given to the conflicting claims of the various religious groups within the given context, and how those claims are perpetuated in the images, symbols, texts, and the propaganda of the dominant. For this reason the methodologies of the historical and social-scientific discourses must not only be supported by religious discourse, but these combined methodologies must be critical of each other. Myth and history are interwoven in ancient texts to the extent that they are at times indistinguishable. Paul appeals to these myths to buttress his argument: the myth of the patriarchs; the myth of the promise of life in the land; the myth of the Davidic Messiah; the Christ myth, which combined the hero myth of Jesus as the one who dies (separated from humanity) to atone, the one who is transformed by God, the one who returns triumphant over death in the resurrection myth; the myth of the eschaton.

These are to be held alongside the Roman myths, which were communicated through their pervasive use of images, symbols, its epic narratives, its glorious triumphant processions, all of which told the story of Rome's power and glory. Rome too had a myth of patriarchs; a myth of universal dominance over all lands; a myth of a savior; a myth of the eschaton that was realized/to be realized in the Golden Age myth. These myths confront each other, and Paul responds theologically through his appeal to various archetypes: to positive archetypes (Abraham, Jacob, and David), as well as to negative archetypes (Pharaoh, Adam, and Esau); the myth of the redemption of the universe and the restoration of Paradise, to his own concept of the golden age myth. For this reason, our exegesis recognizes the history-of-religions discourse alongside the historical and social-scientific discourse in our ideological reading of the text.

Flowing from these will also be the ethical or moral discourse, which seeks to inform a people how to live in a specific context. The ethical discourse also acts as a critique on the power structures at work in a particular context. Our application of the moral discourse is based on the widely accepted premise that the letter confronts a situation in the political context of a given community, but the situation arises out of a greater national and ethnic context. Our reading presupposes that the ethical discourse has to be read primarily in the relationship between Rome and the nations subordinated by her imperial politics and military prowess, and specifically between Rome and Israel; between Gentiles and Jews. On a lower level the ethical discourse has to be understood in the relationship between Christ-believing Jews and Gentiles and non-Christ-believing Jews respectively; and, between Christ-believing Gentiles and Christ-believing Jews. But the moral discourse is heavily dependent upon the biblical tradition; Paul takes as a given the Deuteronomic concern for the other, a concern which maintains that people are more important than material existence. Concepts of justice and mercy therefore are important divine attributes that are critical to Paul's theology and his understanding of the ordering of human relationships.

Together, the interplay of these discourses gives rise to the rhetoric or argument of a particular text. For this reason, rhetorical and argumentative analysis has to be given full consideration in any attempt to understand the persuasive contours

of a text. This, however, is not to suggest that any predefined rhetorical style is to be imposed on the text without due consideration being given to the linguistic domain of the implied author. We therefore, from a limited perspective, apply rhetorical methodologies to the text, but do not stick slavishly to classical Greco-Roman literary conventions (including the conventions of the Greco-Roman letter) and Aristotelian logic, even if we employ those conventions primarily for the purpose of delimiting the study. To this extent, we hold in tension the rules of composition attached to classical rhetoric, recognizing that such conventions were fluid and would have impacted on Paul's literary creativity, with the peculiarities of Semitic biblical rhetoric, a literary style that has been discovered to be common to all the Semitic literature. It is in holding these two styles in tension with one another that we bring peculiar insight into the rhetorical contours and structure of the text.

To these must be added the discourse of the reader. We have already outlined the major social biases which inform our reading of the text. We do so not out of apology, but out of our own conviction that our worldview still contains sufficient vestiges of our colonial past as that of a subordinate culture, as a colony under an imperial state. It is for this reason that we maintain that in many ways our worldview approximates that of the subordinated Jews and of Paul, a view that may either be clouded or remain totally unappreciated when reading from within the dominant culture. It is based on the simple assertion that the character and nature of imperialism remains the same even if the context, whether temporal or spatial, may have changed. The present quest of globalization (its politics, military rule, economic deprivation, ethics, which together creates the pervasive atmosphere of dominance) demonstrates this. Our responses as readers is a result of our social location, our personal identity. Our methodology is therefore a blend of the historical, the social-scientific, the history-of-religions, the ethical, the rhetorical or literary, and reader-response, in light of our social and cultural location, which together create our ideological methodology.

OUR EXEGETICAL PREMISES AND PRESUPPOSITIONS

Our reading is therefore postmodern in the sense that it brings together several disciplines and theological approaches without fear of contradiction. In the first place, it is deliberately historical-critical and political.[15] We have located the text in the socio-historical context of the period in which it was written, appealing particularly to the texts of the dominant society that were used to naturalize their hegemony. By doing so we have located the text in its broadest social milieu of Roman imperial dominance, thereby going beyond the narrower reading, which locates Romans within the context of the aftermath of the Claudian edict. In this way, we have sought to despiritualize the text and to locate it within the sphere of the lived-realities of a

15. See Stendahl, "Contemporary" in *IDB*, Vol. 1: 418–32. He sees historical criticism as the intermingling of three stages of exegesis; "what it meant," "what it means," and "translation." We critically engage with these stages, even if we recognise that the latter two are dependent on the exegete.

specific community in a given historical context. This reading removes the tendency to treat the text as an ahistorical document and as a purely theological treatise. We therefore detheologize the text on the one hand, but theologize it on the other. The theology which we discover in the text flows from its historical context, from the experience of a community with special concerns and discrete social tensions. Alongside experience, the tradition of Israel as the people of God, Scripture, and the skilful application of Midrashic and haggadic techniques become the formative sources of Paul's theology of the letter, which may be summed up in the statement: *The God of Israel is sovereign over all peoples and all creation.*

Secondly, our reading is postcolonial[16] in that we have sought to locate our exegetical perspective with those whose hermeneutical voices are marginalized.[17] We boldly assert that our reading is primarily from our social location in the two-thirds world.[18] In this way, it may be seen as a reading that goes against hegemony of the dominant Western theological academy and colonial hegemony.[19] Nevertheless it is a reading in which we find solidarity with the experience of many postcolonial critics who have sought to have a reading of the text that is for the most part engaging and resisting of this dominant academy; an experience of disdain and rejection.[20] In this way, we propose that our reading is postcolonial while at the same time it is ideological, for these two perspectives can hardly be said to exist mutually independent of each other.

16. For an introduction to postcolonialism and biblical criticism see Donaldson, "Postcolonialism" in Burnett and Fewell, *Postcolonialism and Scriptural*, 1–14. See also Sujirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Bible*, *passim*.

17. See the collection of essays in Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies*, as well as Sujirtharajah, *Voices from the Margin*. For an essay showing the interaction between the social location of the text between empire and colony see Berquist, "Postcolonialism," in Burnett and Fewell, *Postcolonialism and Scriptural*, 15–35. For a challenge to Caribbean trained theologians to adopt a cultural-based approach that reflects their contextual hermeneutic see Mulrain, "Is There a Calypso?" in Sujirtharajah, *Voices from the Margin*, 37–47.

18. See Bailey, "The Danger of Ignoring One's Own Cultural Bias in Interpreting the Text." Segovia, "Toward a Hermeneutics of the Diaspora," argues for a reading strategy of intercultural criticism as one among many as a way of approaching and interpreting the Bible in the Diaspora of the Third World and of Hispanic Americans. In other words Segovia is giving prominence to the idea of the social location of the exegete. See also Tolbert, "The Politics." For an example of the variety of readings that result from intercultural criticism in New Testament studies see Segovia, *"What Is John?"*

19. We side with Patte, "Acknowledging," in Segovia and Tolbert, *Reading from this Place*, 35–55. Patte sees European-American exegesis as primarily absolutizing (ibid., 45–47) and androcratic, and suggests that consideration has to be given to bring the other to a "critical understanding of *their own* faith-interpretations" rather than demanding the other to "abandon their ('wrong') ordinary readings or faith-interpretations in order to adopt *the* correct critical interpretation that we teach them." (ibid., 55). See also Myers, "The Hermeneutical Dilemma," who sees the postgraduate programmes and academic institutions falling under Eurocentric interests. Lest we forget, the good New Testament scholar is one who must be able to read German. See also Horsley, "Submerged Biblical."

20. See Sujirtharajah, "Inter-faith Hermeneutics." See also Segovia, "My Personal Voice," esp. 29–32, and the story he tells of his encounter with a Professor from a dominant theological academy who rejected his focus of investigating the "competing ideologies of the early Christian texts in the face of the Roman imperial situation," by questioning whether such connection was of importance. We share a similar experience, in that when I explained to one American lecturer in New Testament Studies the intention and goal of this book, his immediate response was: "And who is going to read that?"

In fact it is our contention that postcolonial biblical criticism must be considered as a subset of that category of the biblical studies that have been labeled as "ideological." But our ideological reading is not just constrained to the hermeneutical task, in that it looks for the way in which power and domination are manipulated in a text given its historical context (therefore historical-critical approach); it is also a reading that recognizes that our perspective may very well be excluded from dominant ways of reading the New Testament.[21] In fact, we make bold to contend that our reading has to be given serious consideration in that we share a not dissimilar social location to that that of Paul and the communities to which he wrote, and the very communities that preserved the primitive text; that is, the experience of life under an imperial, colonial, dominant power. Postcolonial biblical criticism therefore takes seriously the ideology and rhetoric of empire and seeks to lay bare the harsh realities of human subjugation by imperial dominance at all levels and in all spheres—whether past, present, or future—of the human endeavor, while paying considerable attention to the way how these are reflected in the religious and political practices of these groups of people. It is therefore not unusual for subjugated people to resist the dominant imperial ideology.[22]

Thirdly, we claim that our reading has a sociological-anthropological Bible-critical perspective. In this way, we seek to integrate the sociological and anthropological theories that are applicable to structures of dominance and subjugation, asserting by way of our own experience and our knowledge of the wider Caribbean historical context, that the content of language—not only that which is spoken/written but also that which is heard—is largely determined by one's own social context. Because of this, our reading takes into account the structure of society, particularly investigating how the various social strata interact with each other, and how this interaction may be discerned in the text. In this way we can say that our reading embraces the theories of social-scientific biblical criticism in a way that gives support to the historical and the political. To support our reading, we therefore draw primarily on the work of James C. Scott and Bruce J. Malina.[23]

Fourthly, we claim that our reading is theological. By this we mean that the primary source for investigation is the content of the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments in general, and Paul's letter to the Romans in particular. It must be pointed out at this time that our major presupposition is that when Paul quotes the Jewish Scriptures, he does so fully cognizant of the historical context of the passages he is citing, and that he intends this context to inform his content. Furthermore, if one can venture to speak of Paul's theology, one cannot escape the fact that the language,

21. For the interplay of the importance for a postcolonial critic to understand the historical context of a given text from a particular social location see Smith, "Hidden in Plain View."

22. See particularly Horsley, "Religion." Horsley's article shows three components of the "patterns of relations between empire and religion: (a) imperial elites' construction of subject peoples' religions, (b) subjected people's revival of their own traditional ways of life in resistance to imperial rule, and (c) the development of religious practices that constitute imperial power relations." Citing the abstract on page 13.

23. See particularly Scott, *Domination and Arts*; Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*; Malina, *The New Testament World*.

concepts, and thought-forms that he employed bore specific relevance to his contemporary situation. In this way we have resisted as much as possible the temptation to restate the biblical story in a way that is anachronistic. In this way our theological reading of the text seeks to relate to the concrete reality of the life of a faith community.[24]

Finally, because of these varied disciplines of our reading, we can return to our initial assertion and maintain that our reading is postmodern. It is postmodern because we break with the tradition of the dominant theological academy, seeing the text from a perspective that, as we have argued, closely approximates that of Paul and his primitive Christian communities. It is post-modern because we break with the grand narrative of the dominant academy and offer instead a reading from the margin. More importantly, it is post-modern because we break with the tradition of slavishly embracing any particular methodology, but rather embrace those aspects of competing methodologies that allow us to make our case. In this way we can conclude that our reading is multidimensional.

APPLICATION OF METHODOLOGY

The tensions between the methodologies discussed above are given further treatment in chapter 1 from the point of view of how they impact specifically on our study, and specifically an ideological analysis of Romans. In chapter 2, we look primarily at the historical context, and particularly the major personage and the literary monument of Roman imperial ideology, *viz*, Augustus and the epic of Virgil—the *Aeneid*. We discuss how this epic legitimized the dominance of Rome, and became the basis of Rome's ideology for successive emperors of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, whose imperial policies gained prevalence in an era that coincided with the emerging Christ-movement. We also critically examine the ideology of the Roman triumph, and the way all these processions communicated the propaganda of the imperial house. We also examine ways in which movement and action of subordinated groups were controlled in general as well as under specific Julio-Claudian emperors. In addition, we look at the tension between the religious expressions of conflicting groups, and at the general response and control of those expressions among the subordinate. We turn specifically to the Emperor Nero, and examine the significance of the proposed aspects of his rule in light of the Christ-movement. We presuppose that Paul was aware of these claims, and that the impact of them on his worldview has to be taken into consideration.

In chapter 3 we look specifically at the argument and style of Rom 1:1–17, which we have, using the tools of classical Greco-Roman rhetoric, designated as the *exordium* of the letter. Alongside of Greco-Roman rhetoric we apply the convention of Greco-Roman letter-writing to identify four distinct pericopes of the *exordium*: the epistolary prescript (Rom 1:1–7); the *proem* (Rom 1:8–15), which is divided between the thanksgiving clause (Rom 1:8–12) and the missionary exhortation (Rom 1:13–15); and the *propositio* (Rom 1:16–17). To each of these pericopes we apply the tools of bib-

24. Our reading is based upon the definitions of theology as stated by Erickson, *Christian*, 21–22.

lical rhetorical criticism in order to determine their stylistic structures, and the tools of rhetorical criticism in order to establish their argumentative contours. From this analysis, we see that the individual central focus of these three pericopes establishes the overriding theme of the letter: The sovereignty of God is established in the lordship of Jesus Christ, as told in the story of the gospel, which is the location and revelation of God's power, and it is these together which Paul seeks to explicate to the community in Rome in order to strengthen them.

In chapters 4 and 5, we return to the epistolary prescript, and conduct an in-depth analysis of its meaning and the implications of the major terms and phrases, especially as they would be heard by a community in the context of Rome. We examine the political nature and meaning of the term "Son of God;" we look at the consequences of referring to Jesus Christ as Lord; and then we look specifically at the two terms of the *adscriptio*, "peace" and "grace," paying particular attention to how the ambivalence of these terms when used within the socio-political context, could comprise a veiled reference to the power structure of Rome on one hand, and the response to and critique of this structure by Paul and the Christ-believing community on the other.

In chapter 6 we look at the key terms of the *propositio* (Rom 1:16–17), paying careful attention to Paul's use of the citation of Scripture from the prophecies of Habakkuk, arguing precisely that the context of this citation must be allowed to be a determining factor in understanding the context within which Paul uses it. The Habakkuk citation points specifically to the revelation of the gospel, which is now revealed as the power of God. We look specifically at the syllogistic structure of the *propositio*, and recognize that the dominant theme and conclusion is that recognition of the sovereignty of God, and human compliance (loyalty/faith) with this truth as revealed in the gospel, leads to salvation. Once again, the meaning of the gospel and the process of salvation may be seen as ambiguous within the socio-political context, once Rome's gospel and the emperor as the divine agent of salvation are taken into consideration.

In chapter 7, we take the combined ideological implications of the *exordium*, but particularly of the epistolary prescript, and apply them to the exegesis of Rom 1–8. We argue that the exegesis of these chapters has to be guided *inter alia* by the group culture of the day, by concepts of honor and shame, of justice and ethics, by controlling myths of the people of Israel understood in light of the Christ-event, particularly from the position of the subordinated Judeo-Christian community and their critique of the power structures of their context. The premise of our argument, demonstrated by reference to a subordinated Caribbean slave community, is based on the presupposition that language has different interpretive nuances for the dominant and for the subordinated respectively. In the same way that the understanding of what is said is determined primarily by the context of the hearer, so too what the speaker says is conditioned by his context. We therefore argue that Rom 1:19—2:16 may be interpreted as a veiled reference to Roman imperialism in general and to Nero in particular. We also argue that Rom 2:17–29 is a critique of the corruption of Jewish (or would-be Jewish) leaders, whose pro-Roman stance endangers the traditions of the people of

God. With this in mind Paul universalizes his theology to take into consideration Jews and humanity in general in light of the Christ-event (Rom 3:1–31), which for Paul establishes in every way the sovereignty of God over his creation and over all humanity. Paul appeals to Abraham (Rom 4:1–25), an archetype of one who becomes subservient to the sovereignty of God in faith, and as a result is entrusted with the universal promise through which all nations will in the process of time come to participate in the salvation-history of the world. Even here, Paul's reference to Abraham as Father resonates within the context of Roman society, challenging the Roman myth of patriarchy through Romulus. Once Paul has established the sovereignty of God under the Lord Jesus Christ, having done a critique of the sovereignty of Rome, her emperors, and her vassal cohorts, he can move on to a generalization of the antithetical world orders: life under the world order established by the sovereignty of God of which Jesus Christ is head, and life under the secular authorities of the world that is characterized by the Adam typology (Rom 5:1–21). The loyalty of humanity to these two opposing world-orders and the consequence of that response are spelt out in Rom 6–8.

The sovereignty of God, the lordship of Jesus Christ, and the critique of Rome and her leaders lead naturally to a discussion on the relationship between Israel and Rome, and particularly an exposé on the continuing role of the people of Israel in God's plan for the world. Paul does this by the skilful use of language and Scripture, and we demonstrate this in chapter 8. We also argue for the tension between two pervasive theological dimensions in Paul's thought; the Deuteronomic assertion of retributive justice and the wisdom-apocalyptic genre (Rom 9–11). We also examine the accumulative consequences of Paul's argument and show how Paul seeks to correct the potentially antithetical theological conclusions with the pastoral exigency of the community. This he does, *inter alia*, in the paraenesis to be found in Rom 12–15, *passim*. We also demonstrate that Paul, in Rom 9–15, not only deals with the relationship between Israel and Rome and implicitly between Jew and Gentile, but he also deals with intra-communal and inter-communal aspects of the ethical requirements of those who are loyal to the lordship of Christ, with special mention of the obligation to Jerusalem flowing from these requirements.

Our conclusions are finally stated in chapter 9. In our opinion, an ideological reading of Romans, encompassing our multi-dimensional methodological approach, not only establishes that the focal points of the exordium redound throughout the breadth of the letter, but also supports the integrity and unity of the letter to the Romans. In conclusion, we therefore look at how the motifs of power, social ordering, and ethics are illuminated by an ideological reading, and show that, finally, it is only when unconditional loyalty is expressed by all humanity to God's sovereignty (his impartial acceptance of all nations and his unconditional grace), and when justice and mercy are independent of ethnic and social status, that the peace of this world approaches in reality the peace of God. Our reading therefore tells us that Romans, like the Wisdom of Solomon, presents in strongest terms a bulwark against all kinds of imperialism, whether religious or political.