A HERMENEUTICAL THEOLOGY FOR THE REFORMED TRADITION IN INDIA
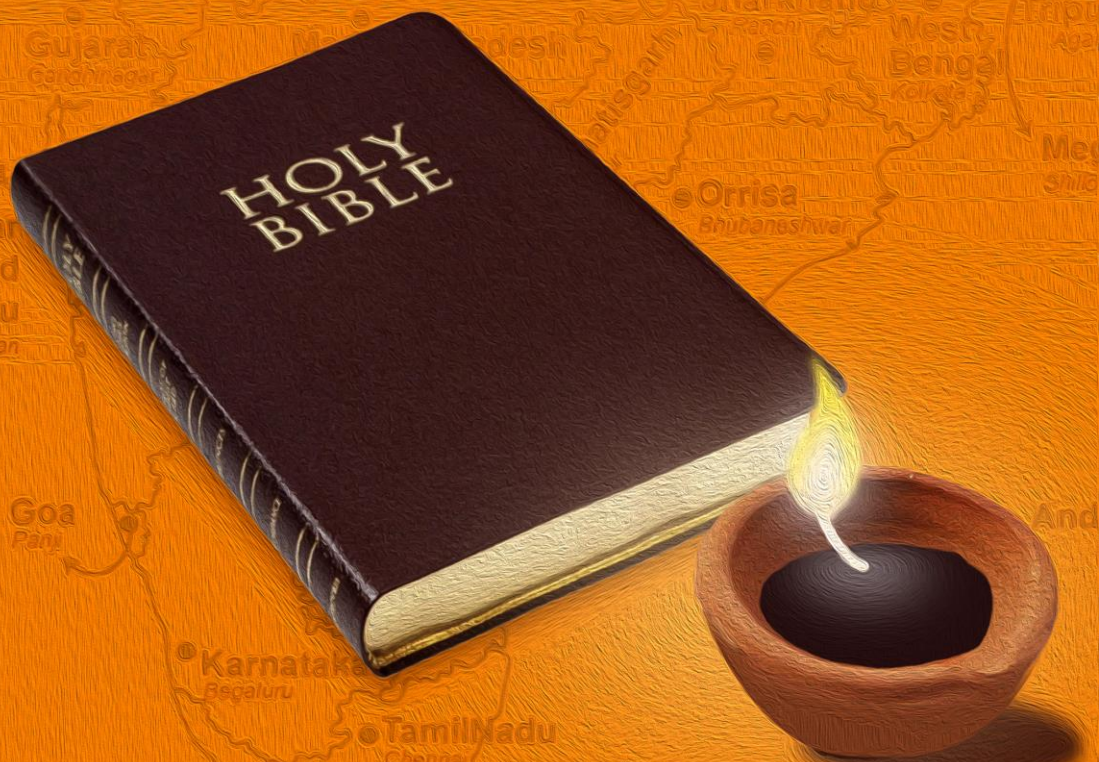
An Analysis of Vanhoozer's Hermeneutical Theology with an Emphasis on the Reformed Doctrine of Scripture and its Relevance for the Reformed Tradition in India

HOLY BIBLE

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DEDICATED

To

Maria, Sophia and Nadia
you show me the meaning of love

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A SUMMARY OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation contributes towards a hermeneutical method that is contextually relevant to the Indian context and faithful to the Reformed acknowledgment of Scriptural authority. Undertaking such a hermeneutical study was birthed in contextual challenges. In particular, the trigger lay in the dilemmas that arise when Christians have to participate in other-religious (i.e., Hindu) burial and cremation practices, in India and other countries, countries that are predominantly multi-religious and exist in a postcolonial context. The absence of biblically sound, theologically reliable, contextually sensitive, and pastorally astute support from the church highlights the challenges Christian believers have to face. This not only widens the gap between the church and the local context but also runs the risk of rendering the church irrelevant. It is the hypothesis of this research that, notwithstanding this neglect, Reformed theology has the ability to address contextual issues in India, without losing sight of its articulation of the authority of Scripture.

The introduction to this research highlights the extent to which Evangelicals and Liberals have addressed contextual and hermeneutical challenges in the local context. Evangelical theologians such as Bruce Nicholls, Paul Heibert, Timothy Tennent, Mohan Chacko, and Bong Rin Ro observe that the evangelical approach to theology was reluctant to integrate the cultural, religious, and national identity of the local context into any theological development in India. This was because they did not consider anything worthwhile in the local culture. The evangelical and the Reformed churches in India were engaged mainly in replicating the Western church and aimed at faithfully applying received timeless truths and universal theological propositions to the changing context. Whereas, Liberal theologians, such as A. J. Appasamy, George Soares-Prabhu, and Brahmabandhav Uphadhaya display contextual sensitivity, but in their work, this implies accepting all sacred texts on the same shelf as equal partners. Hence, in this process, the authority of Scripture is diluted with the use of other religious texts, spiritual experiences, and reason.

The research points out how the difficulty of addressing contextual challenges in Reformed theology in India could be considered from the perspective of more than one theological discipline. A first approach could be contextual theology which, according to Scott Moreau, focuses on evangelism and which method is therefore often limited to preaching, church planting, and discipleship. In such a contextual approach, the doctrine of Scripture lies often only on the periphery. A second possible discipline is systematic theology, which employs the doctrine of Scripture as its mantra but is historically marked by its ambition to respond to the Roman Catholic tradition, and the challenges from Enlightenment philosophers. A third approach is the theology of religions where the farcical and superficial polarity between exclusivism and inclusivism threatens to limit the reading of Scripture and to affect the attitude of the Church towards other religions. A fourth approach is hermeneutics which not only studies the text and context of the author but also interplays with the contextual issues of the reader. However, the context of the present reader often becomes the priority over that of the author and text of Scripture. Although all four of these theological disciplines seem to offer a viable

route for addressing contextual issues in theology, hermeneutics could incorporate the other three. Hence, the research will follow Kevin Vanhoozer's Theological hermeneutics as a viable route. Vanhoozer's model promises to provide a theological approach that is equally true to the Reformed doctrine of Scripture and to the requirements of the Indian context. Moreau argues that Vanhoozer's model of contextualization has a strong emphasis on Scripture and Church doctrine as driving forces for contextualization. He calls Vanhoozer's model a theodramatic orientation which "views the gospel as essentially dramatic, the Bible as a script, doctrine as theatrical direction, and the church as part of the ongoing performance of salvation."

The hypothesis for this dissertation is that Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theory contributes toward a theological approach that is contextually relevant to the Indian context of multi-religiosity and postcolonialism. At the same time, it remains faithful to the Reformed conviction concerning the authority of Scripture. Accordingly, Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theory will be evaluated from the perspective of the Reformed doctrine of Scripture. It will also be tested and confronted through virtual dialogue with Kwame Bediako's and R. Sugirtharajah's theories of hermeneutics, which have been developed within multi-religious and postcolonial contexts, respectively. Finally, Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology will be tested by considering its practical consequences in the arena of burial in a multi-religious context.

The preceding considerations result in investigating the main research question and the outline of this study: "**In what ways can Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theory contribute towards a theology which is contextually relevant to the Indian context, while faithfully upholding the Reformed vision on the authority of Scripture?**" This main research question will guide the sub-questions for the subsequent chapters. The research question guiding the second chapter is: "**In what way does Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theory address hermeneutical and contextual challenges and to what extent does he succeed in continuing the tradition of a Reformed view on Scripture?**" The research question guiding the third chapter will be: "**To what extent does an interaction with Bediako's African hermeneutics confirm, contradict or improve Vanhoozer's hermeneutical model, especially with respect to its potential to interact within a multi-religious context?**" The fourth chapter will examine: "**To what extent does an interaction with Sugirtharajah's postcolonial Asian hermeneutics confirm, contradict or improve Vanhoozer's hermeneutical model, especially with respect to its potential sensitivity to the role of power-structures in the Indian context?**" The research will culminate with the fifth chapter which will ask the following question: "**How does an analysis of Vanhoozer's hermeneutics, refined by engagement with the hermeneutics of both Bediako and Sugirtharajah, result in a satisfying expansion of the Reformed doctrine of Scripture, and a hermeneutical theology that is relevant to the Indian context, especially in relation to burial practices in this multi-religious context?**"

The second chapter addresses Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theory and its response to hermeneutical and contextual challenges, and further expands on a Reformed view of Scripture It should be emphasized that the main theological

arguments of this chapter are based on Vanhoozer's theological hermeneutics as propounded in *The Drama of Doctrine.* Vanhoozer defines theological hermeneutics as discerning the discourse, which is the communicative act of the Triune God in the Bible**.** Vanhoozer calls the Bible "Scripture" because it acknowledges a divine intention that does not contravene but supervenes on, the communicative intentions of its human author. Vanhoozer developed his theological hermeneutics by assimilating both the challenges posed by modernity which employed its own reasoning power and the scientific method, and postmodernity which was incredulous towards reason, metanarrative, and individual autonomy. As a response to modernity, postmodernity argued for use of language within the human experience, various local human stories/narratives, and their cultural practices and actions. It also integrated a challenge from contextual theology with an emphasis on history and tradition, society and practice, and a rediscovery of one's cultural identity. Vanhoozer explicitly emphasizes that neither modernity nor postmodernity has set his theological agenda but instead simply instigated it. His response is not one of compromise between these three but is rather a dispute with their method and the content of their hermeneutics. Yet he accommodates their method in his Theological hermeneutics which integrates human reason and human creativity within divine revelation and divine command. Furthermore, he proposes a way that passes through all the challenges posed by modernity, postmodernity, and contextual theology. This way is "the turn to drama," which amalgamates all the previous methods and directs them into one. Vanhoozer argues that the drama metaphor is congruent with redemption because redemption includes a speech-act. It is God's communicative act in history; it cultivates the mind of Christ and it entails perceiving and performing to the wanting world. Vanhoozer picks up elements of drama that are compatible with the story of redemption, analogies which portray clear points, and are compatible with the Scripture. A few elements of the drama metaphor which Vanhoozer carries over into Theodrama are: the gospel as drama, the canon as script, doctrine as direction, the Holy Spirit as the principal director, church officers (such as bishops, elders, and more importantly pastors) as assistant directors and theologians as dramaturges.

After describing the methodology, the research also states how Vanhoozer propounds various theological categories in interaction with a Reformed theology of Scripture. He reframes the inspiration of Scripture as, "a matter of the Spirit's prompting the human authors to say just what the divine playwright intended."[1] The metaphor of prompting in this reframed understanding implies 'witnessing, urging, assisting, recalling to mind, supplying the right word, and articulating'.[2] In a similar argument, Vanhoozer redefines canonization as not just "divinely revealed information only but a set of divine communicative practices into which the Spirit draws the church to participate and get understanding."[3] In his theological hermeneutics, the authority of Scripture is perceived in the triune economy of God's communicative action: locution, illocution, and perlocution. This means that "The ultimate authority for Christian theology is the Triune God

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[1] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 227.

[2] Vanhoozer, 227.

[3] Vanhoozer, 229.

speaking-acting in the Scripture."[4] In a similar tone, Vanhoozer reframes the sufficiency of Scripture by arguing that the Scripture is sufficient so that human beings can respond to God, and "trust the promises, obey the commands, heed the warnings, sing the songs, believe the assertions, and hope for the ending."[5] Thus, Vanhoozer's reframed theology of Scripture is apparent in five theses that summarize Theological hermeneutics, which acknowledge both the performance of the Triune God and the human authors. Vanhoozer attempts to bring to attention not just the work of God in the doctrine of Scripture, as traditional theologies do. But he also emphasizes the prominence of the role of the human authors and the function of literary genres, which have a significant place in a postmodern view of Scripture. In fact, Vanhoozer's emphasis on God (Divine action) in producing the Scripture is located within the Triune work of God, with significant emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit who prompted the human authors. It is noteworthy how Vanhoozer retrieves and expands the Reformed theology of Scripture.

Vanhoozer further implements his methodology and expansion of the Reformed doctrine of Scripture to his hermeneutical theology. Vanhoozer proposes "a six-fold path" as a canonical-linguistic approach to implement his hermeneutical theology. The first aspect is his *postpropositionalist* approach. He defines,

> Postpropositionalist theology insists that there is more to Scripture than revealed propositions, more than separate divine thoughts, more even than a system of divine thoughts. It is in this sense that postpropositionalist theology is pluralistic. Yet an immediate qualification is in order, for the post in propositionalist does not mean against but beyond. There is more, not less, in the canon than propositional revelation.[6]

Second, *postconservative* theology perceives revelation to be more than just communication of information or proposition. Vanhoozer does not undermine the propositional aspect of revelation but stresses that the work of revelation is more than revealing information. The divine communicative act is also a personal encounter and aims to edify the relationship between God and humans. It transcends the dichotomies between referring and expressing, between God-saying and God-doing. Berry labels Vanhoozer's postconservative approach as 'Redemptive-Historical speech act.'[7] Third, the *postfoundationalist* approach to theology neither considers 'propositional truths that serve as foundations for knowledge' nor accepts the church community or any community's belief as their foundation. Instead, it seeks to "hold onto the ideals of truth, objectivity, and rationality, while at the same time acknowledging the provisional, contextual, and fallible nature of human reason."[8] Fourth, "prosaic theology seeks to learn the habits of seeing, thinking, tasting, inherent in the diverse literary forms of

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[4] Vanhoozer, 67.

[5] Vanhoozer, 291.

[6] Vanhoozer, 276.

[7] C Everett Berry, "Theological vs. Methodological Postconservatism: Stanley Grenz and Kevin Vanhoozer as Test Cases," *Westminster Theological Journal* 69, no. 1 (March 1, 2007): 115.

[8] F. LeRon Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology: Wolfhart Pannenberg and the New Theological Rationality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 58; in Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 293.

Scripture and to continue them in equally ordinary forms of life. For it is precisely our everyday patterns of life that form habits. Habits, in turn, form character; and character, as we know, is plot."[9] This fourth aspect is built upon the postpropositionalist and postconservative approaches to reading the Scripture. Fifth is the *phronetic* approach to theology. Several terms such as practical reason, good judgment, and prudence are used by Vanhoozer to explain phronesis. The phronetic approach is the ability to exercise good judgment in specific contexts which are inculcated and nurtured by the Scripture.[10] Sixth is the *prophetic* approach to theology. A prophetic approach to theology plays the role of a prophet, as we meet them in the Old Testament. Whenever the church dwindles from Theodrama in addressing contextual concerns, prophetic theology acts on behalf of God. After an analysis, the research concludes that Vanhoozer does not reject the Reformed tradition about Scripture but faithfully upholds it. He, however, disagrees with it on some ideas, and hence, develops what was underemphasized. Although this implies modifications to the Reformed tradition by Vanhoozer, this reformulation should be perceived as an enrichment or expansion of the Reformed tradition in a postmodern context. Based on the analysis, the chapter affirms that Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology has pertinently and adequately addressed the hermeneutical and contextual challenges posed both by modernity and postmodernity.

The third chapter analysed the hermeneutical theology of Vanhoozer against the African hermeneutics of Bediako concerning its potential within a multi-religious context. Bediako is a Ghanaian scholar who engaged theologically with Reformed and Presbyterian scholars worldwide while arguing for the Africanization of Christianity. While improvising hermeneutical theology in Africa, Bediako perceived the Gospel as comprehensive. This approach combines the cultural, social, and religious categories of the Bible and the African context as one: the Akan story. Apart from the Scriptures, the salient means of the pre-incarnate work of Scripture are knowledge of God in African Traditional Religion (ATR), grassroots theology (oral theology expressed in the writings of lay people in Africa), and continuation of the revelation in the African Christian experience of Christ. Scripture is seen as a prism shedding new rays of light on culture and tradition in Africa. This image implies that the centrality of Scripture is fundamental in portraying a fresh dimension to African culture and identity, unlike the quintessential missionary methods where the Scriptural texts were used as lenses or spectacles to evaluate and often demonize African culture.[11] Based on his hermeneutical theology, Bediako presents Jesus as the supreme Ancestor, the Ancestor par excellence. Bediako argues that Christ "by virtue of his Incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension into the realms of spirit-power, can rightly be designated, in African terms, as Ancestor, indeed Supreme Ancestor."[12]

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[9] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 310.

[10] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Theological Education and the Church: The School of Theodrama," *International Theological Education for the 21st Century*, n.d., part three.

[11] Kwame Bediako, "Scripture as the Interpreter of Culture and Tradition," in *Africa Bible Commentary*, ed. Tokunboh. Adeyemo (Nairobi and Kenya/ Grand Rapids, MI: WordAlive Publishers/ Zondervan, 2006), 7.

[12] Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh/Maryknoll, NY: Edinburgh University Press/Orbis Books, 1995), 217.

The analysis shows that Bediako confirms Vanhoozer's adherence to speech-act theory, because the Bible becomes God's Word in translated Scripture when the reader is illuminated by the Holy Spirit. Bediako considers the original autograph to be abstract which is in contrast to Vanhoozer who affirms the original autograph (canon) to be God's Word even when it does not find its destiny in a particular context. Bediako follows the Vanhoozarian principle of redefining/sanctifying the prosaic terms in improvisation. He employs local metaphors to clarify the authority of Scripture. Bediako does so by emphasizing its continuity with the religious elements rather than its discontinuity. While improvising, Bediako also affirms Vanhoozer's insistence on theology based on more than just propositions extracted from the Bible. Bediako differs from Vanhoozer, by claiming genuine ecclesial autonomy for the African Church. Vanhoozer argues that no language or culture can elevate itself to be the exclusive norm for the church; the canon has the sole right as the norming norm.[13] If Vanhoozer aspires to 'Christianize the local religious experience,' Bediako aims to 'Africanize the Christian experience': Jesus as mediator, Lord, reigning chief, and Supreme Ancestor over other gods and spirits. Through this virtual assessment of Vanhoozer, Bediako affirms that several Vanhoozerian hermeneutical elements, and his doctrine of Scripture are relevant to a multi-religious context. Therefore, the investigation in this third chapter concludes that Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theory and Reformed doctrine of Scripture, are satisfactorily reliable, relevant, and fitting for a multi-religious context.

The fourth chapter investigates, "To what extent does an interaction with Sugirtharajah's postcolonial hermeneutics confirm, contradict or improve Vanhoozer's hermeneutical model, especially with respect to its potential sensitivity to the role of power-structures in theology?" The 'ubiquitous' R.S. Sugirtharajah, as many postcolonial scholars call him, aims "to bring the person of Jesus, in conjunction with other religious figures, into a revitalizing and enriching encounter with them and with the Christian faith itself."[14] He has pioneered and centered his entire biblical and theological studies into postcolonial biblical criticism. Vanhoozer and Sugirtharajah are significant luminaries committed to hermeneutical exploration, focusing on the authority of Scripture from different contextual trajectories. They have a common agenda to rescue the Scriptures from power structures and to show that the task of theology is not just informing but transforming as well. However, they hold a view contrary to each other with respect to the content, source, and purpose of this transformation.

The analysis of the chapter concludes that Sugirtharajah's theology implies disapproval of Vanhoozer's fundamental belief in the exclusive redemptive claims of Jesus Christ, as well as of his theological and Trinitarian hermeneutics, his magisterial and ministerial authority of Scripture, and the ministerial role of the ecclesia. Yet, Sugirtharajah's hermeneutical strategies confirm and even advance Vanhoozarian hermeneutical theology. Sugirtharajah affirms Vanhoozer's observations on power structure in executing the authority of Scripture. It should be underscored that Sugirtharajah's allegation of Western domination in the

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[13] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 319.

[14] R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations: An Alternative Way of Reading the Bible and Doing Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2003), 5.

theological formation of the authority of Scripture is well observed by Vanhoozer.[15] More so, Sugirtharajah would not hesitate to agree with Vanhoozer's argument in pointing out the contextual and cultural limitations of Western theology.[16] Sugirtharajah also confirms the validity of Vanhoozer's argument to employ prosaic metaphors in hermeneutics. However, Sugirtharajah uses these metaphors for highlighting gaps, absences, and imbalances between religious texts, and to challenge the notion that a text possesses a finished and once for all meaning.[17] Sugirtharajah shares Vanhoozer's resistance to the West's hermeneutical strategy based purely on propositions and assertions extracted from the Bible. He further confirms Vanhoozer's critical observation that this method is highly influenced by modern scientific methodology and was developed to cater to the needs of the modern period. Further, Vanhoozer and Sugirtharajah have vociferously pointed out how the Euro-American understanding has denied any religious syncretistic practices on their part in their secular Western context, and yet have persistently pointed out the religious syncretism practiced within religiously pluralistic contexts.[18] Sugirtharajah affirms Vanhoozer's argument of a necessary intersection between global and local in improvisation. He, however, treats all religions and religious texts as equal and authoritative such that these texts from various sacred narratives interact, correct, and complement each other. Jesus is only perceived as a wisdom teacher, one among many others. Sugirtharajah's proposal contradicts Vanhoozer's critical syncretism. Another Vanhoozerian hermeneutical element, which has found strong affirmation in Sugirtharajah's work, is vernacular hermeneutics. Sugirtharajah links biblical texts and cultural divides through conceptual parallels between Scripture and other religions to illuminate Scripture so that the gaps between the biblical texts and the local culture may be bridged. While doing so, Sugirtharajah rejects Vanhoozer's belief in the authority of Scripture by regarding both the ecclesial enterprise and the Bible as colonial apparatuses. Through this virtual assessment of Vanhoozer, Sugirtharajah affirms several Vanhoozerian hermeneutical elements, within the doctrine of Scripture, which are relevant for a multi-religious context. The fourth chapter concluded that Vanhoozer's hermeneutical strategies convincingly address the phenomenon of power structures in a multi-religious context.

The fifth chapter implements Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology to burial practices in a multi-religious and postcolonial context after being tested by Bediako and Sugirtharajah. The hermeneutic conversation arranged in the earlier chapters between Vanhoozer (now through one of his collaborators), Bediako and Sugirtharajah is repeated here in a form focused on dealing with cultural-religious funeral practices. In that context, the study pays extra attention to the backgrounds

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[15] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), Mission in the modern west: Discovery and Domination. eBook format.

[16] Vanhoozer, Our big fat Greek method: What are they saying about western theological thought? eBook format.

[17] R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: History, Method, Practice*, 1 edition (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 143; R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Troublesome Texts: The Bible in Colonial and Contemporary Culture* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press Ltd, 2008), 146.

[18] Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All," Exaggeration "the one": religious globalization, eBook format; R. S. Sugirtharajah, "Reconceiving Jesus: Some Continuing Concerns," in *Asian Faces of Jesus*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1993), 260.

and significance of Hindu funeral rites. In addition, the study sketches a backdrop within the Reformed tradition for Vanhoozer's approach using Calvin's views on burial. This part results in elaborated suggestions to Indian Christians for burial practices in a Hindu context. Furthermore, the research concludes how this reframed doctrine of Scripture and hermeneutical theology thereby proves relevant to the Reformed tradition in India. An approach along the lines of Vanhoozer appears to have no problems with the use of trendy and creative ways of burial practices as long as the meaning of death, judgment, Christ's victory over death, and life after death as presented in the Bible are not compromised. The test indicates that Bediako affirms Vanhoozer by his insistence on focusing on the biblical meaning of death and burial and allowance of creative ways of burial as long as the rituals celebrate the life lived, and honor the death of the loved one. He also affirms Vanhoozer's reluctance in allowing extravagant burial rituals. But he does allow extravagant burial practices only if the gospel is not dominated by the burial rites. Similarly, in the test against Sugirtharajah, the research concludes that Sugirtharajah affirms Vanhoozer who aims at comforting the bereaved during the funeral. Vanhoozer agrees to give comfort, not just through the Bible but also through other – even extravagant - cultural ways during the funeral, if it includes the meaning of life, death, and resurrection based on the Bible. Sugirtharajah differs from Vanhoozer in his emphasis on the source of peace and comfort to the bereaved because he employs diverse sacred texts, prayers, and customs taken from different religions to console the bereaved family, whereas Vanhoozer trusts Jesus as the sole comforter and giver of life after death. Based on the test, Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology allows the Reformed tradition in India to improvise socio-religious suitable burial practices to honour and respect the deceased as long as the distinctives of the Christian faith are maintained. The research concluded that Vanhoozerian hermeneutical theology is relevant in burial practices in a multi-religious context because his approach is not a fixed detailed method but organic in nature. His method promotes the use of metaphors, religious conceptual tools, and creativity in burial practices for social harmony, with an emphasis on the meaning of death, judgment, Christ's victory over death, and life after death which is propelled in Theodrama.

This fifth chapter also shows the relevance of Vanhoozer's reframed doctrine of Scripture, in accordance with the Reformed vision, for Indian Reformed traditions. Since reformed churches in India employ the Westminster Confession of Faith as their confessional statement, the research limits its reference to this document only to show the expansion of Vanhoozer and its relevance for India. Vanhoozer reframed the biblical authority which constitutes God's revealed information (content) in the words of others such as prophets, kings, apostles, disciples, believers, and unbelievers (forms). The significance of emphasis on the authority of the literary forms along with the content not only guides believers to a better understanding but also guides them to make a theological judgment of the gospel in any given context. The expansion of the inspiration of the Scripture is also acknowledged in the work of the Holy Spirit who commissions, authorizes, and appropriates biblical text by prompting the human authors to say just what the Triune God intended.[19] This reframed definition highlights the organic process of inspiration and alerts the church to the danger of depicting the Bible as a

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[19] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 227.

supernatural book with no connection to the world and the biblical text as a surrogate divine agent which further checks the danger of bibliolatry. The sufficiency of Scripture is reframed with an emphasis on recounting the true story of the world and its relation to its participation in Gods works.[20] This entails trusting His promises, obeying the commands, heeding the warnings, believing in the assertions, and hoping for the ending.

The chapter also concludes that the Vanhoozerian six-fold path in hermeneutical theology is relevant for India. First, the postpropositionalist approach equally authorizes both literary genres and propositions: form and content which not only inform us about Christ but forms us in Christ to be competent witnesses to Christ. Second, the postfoundationalist approach makes way for a charitable, modest, contrapuntal approach to other religions and their interpretive frameworks enhancing both their faith and the doctrine of God. It also corroborates the biblical witness and reorients the text within a Christocentric context. This approach to theology enriches our understanding of spirituality, constructing civil, social, and medical ethics, and maintaining social harmony. Third, the postconservative approach emphasizes the concomitance of the magisterial authority of Scripture and the ministerial service of the interpretive community (ecclesia) in discerning and appropriating Theodrama in contemporary situations. Fourth, the prosaic approach controls cultural relativism, colonialism, and absolutism in improvisation. Fifth, the phronetic approach assists the church in India in the improvisation of Theodrama. This is done not by mere replication (repetition of Scripture) or innovation (departure from Scripture) but by Scripture driven inculcation and nurturing. Then being powered by the Holy Spirit, the church can be soaked in interpretive virtues and theodramatic formation. Sixth, prophetic theology confronts and corrects the Indian church in the face of the threat of syncretism. It also protests against the church's capitulation of the Gospel to intellectual, cultural, social, and political powers.

The sixth chapter offers a brief overview concluding the dissertation. The dissertation confirms the hypothesis that Reformed theology is capable of addressing the contextual challenges that religious pluralism and postcoloniality pose to the Reformed church in India, without undermining the Reformed doctrine of Scripture. This research validates that Kevin Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology is a relevant Reformed hermeneutical model which stays faithful to the Reformed teaching of Scripture at the same time as addressing the contextual needs of the Reformed churches in India.

Two theologians test and confirm the validity of the Vanhoozerian hermeneutical theology. Bediako confirms that the Vanhoozerian hermeneutical theology is relevant and beneficial within religious pluralistic contexts. Sugirtharajah, although he disregards the Vanhoozerian Trinitarian framework as well as Vanhoozer's theology of the authority of Scripture, does confirm Vanhoozerian hermeneutical strategies which can illuminate and address religious and Western power structures. Further, the research confirms Vanhoozerian hermeneutical theology as relevant in addressing funeral rites in a multi-religious

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[20] Vanhoozer and Treier, *Theology and the Mirror of Scripture: A Mere Evangelical Account*, Scripture as the mirror of truth: Canonical reflection, eBook format.

context. Based on this Vanhoozerian hermeneutical theology, the dissertation proposed three different ways of improvising the funeral rites in a Christian-Hindu context.

The research culminates, in interaction with Westminster Confession of faith, in a Vanhoozerian reformulation of Scriptural authority for the Reformed churches in India. Further, it also validated the relevance of the six aspects of Vanhoozer's canonical-linguistic approach to contextual theology for the Reformed churches in India.

EEN SAMENVATTING VAN HET PROEFSCHRIFT

Dit proefschrift wil een bijdrage vormen aan het ontwikkelen van een hermeneutische methode die contextueel relevant is voor de Indiase context en tegelijk trouw aan de gereformeerde erkenning van het Schriftgezag. De noodzaak tot een dergelijk onderzoek komt voort uit contextuele uitdagingen, in India en andere landen die overwegend multireligieus zijn en zich in een postkoloniale context bevinden. De aanleiding lag met name in de dilemma's die zich voordoen wanneer christenen moeten deelnemen aan anders-religieuze (i.c. Hindoe-) begrafenis- en crematiepraktijken. Kerken uit de gereformeerde traditie bieden op dat punt geen bijbels gefundeerde, theologisch betrouwbare, contextueel sensitieve en pastoraal verstandige steun aan gelovigen, die daardoor voor grote uitdagingen staan. Dit vergroot niet alleen de kloof tussen de kerk en de lokale context, maar dreigt de kerk ook irrelevant te maken. De hypothese van dit onderzoek is dat, ondanks dit tekort, de gereformeerde theologie in staat is contextuele problemen in India aan te pakken, zonder haar articulatie van het gezag van de Schrift daarbij kwijt te raken.

In de inleiding van dit onderzoek wordt gewezen op de mate waarin *Evangelicals* en *Liberals* de contextuele en hermeneutische uitdagingen in de lokale context hebben aangepakt. *Evangelical*-theologen zoals Bruce Nicholls, Paul Hiebert, Timothy Tennent, Mohan Chacko en Bong Rin Ro merken op dat de *Evangelical* benadering van theologie terughoudend is geweest wat betreft het integreren van de culturele, religieuze en nationale identiteit van de lokale context in Indiase theologische ontwikkelingen. Dit kwam omdat zij geen waarde zag in de plaatselijke cultuur. De evangelische en gereformeerde kerken in India waren veelal vooral bezig de Westerse kerk te kopiëren, en streefden ernaar voorgegeven tijdloze waarheden en universele theologische stellingen getrouw toe te passen op de veranderende context. Liberale theologen zoals A.J. Appasamy, George Soares-Prabhu en Brahmabandhav Uphadhaya geven weliswaar blijk van gevoel voor contextualiteit maar zij doen dit door alle heilige teksten op gelijke hoogte als gelijkwaardige partners te aanvaarden. In dat proces verwatert dus het gezag van de Schrift als gevolg van de interactie met andere religieuze teksten, spirituele ervaringen en de rede.

Het onderzoek signaleert dat het adresseren van deze contextuele uitdagingen voor de gereformeerde theologie in India vanuit het perspectief van meer dan één theologische discipline zouden kunnen worden aangevat. Een eerste benadering biedt de contextuele theologie, die volgens Scott Moreau gericht is op evangelisatie en waarvan de methode zich daarom vaak beperkt tot prediking, kerkplanting en discipelschap. Bij dit accent op contextualiteit ontvangt de leer met betrekking tot de Schrift daarom vaak perifere aandacht. . Een tweede discipline zou de systematische theologie kunnen zijn. Deze legt grote nadruk op de schriftleer, maar is daarbij historisch gestempeld door de ambitie om antwoorden te formuleren op de uitdagingen van respectievelijk de rooms-katholieke traditie en verlichtingsfilosofen. Een derde mogelijke benadering loopt via de theologie van de godsdiensten. Daar dreigt echter een al te gemakkelijke en oppervlakkige polariteit tussen exclusivisme en inclusivisme de lezing van de Schrift te beperken en de houding van de kerk tegenover andere godsdiensten te

beïnvloeden. Een vierde benadering levert de hermeneutiek, die niet alleen de tekst en de context van de auteur bestudeert, maar ook ingaat op de contextuele vragen van de lezer. Vaak krijgt daarbij de context van de huidige lezer echter voorrang boven die van de auteur en de tekst van de Schrift. Hoewel alle vier deze theologische disciplines in principe een mogelijke route aanbieden om contextuele kwesties in de theologie aan te pakken, kan de hermeneutiek de accenten van de andere drie omvatten en integreren. Daarom beweegt dit onderzoek zich langs het spoort van de hermeneutiek, door zich te concentreren op de *Theologische hermeneutiek* van Kevin Vanhoozer. Vanhoozer's model belooft een theologische benadering te bieden die zowel trouw is aan de gereformeerde leer van de Schrift als aan de eisen van de Indiase context. Moreau stelt dat Vanhoozers model van contextualisering een sterke nadruk legt op de Schrift en de kerkelijke leer als drijvende krachten voor contextualisering. Hij noemt Vanhoozers model een theodramatische oriëntatie die "het evangelie ziet als essentieel dramatisch, de Bijbel als script, de leer als theatrale regie, en de kerk als onderdeel van de voortdurende opvoering van het heil."

De hypothese waarmee dit proefschrift inzet, is dat Vanhoozers hermeneutische theorie kan bijdragen aan een theologische benadering die relevant is voor de Indiase context van multireligiositeit en postkolonialisme. Tegelijkertijd blijft zij trouw aan de gereformeerde overtuiging betreffende het gezag van de Schrift. De hermeneutische theorie van Vanhoozer zal worden geëvalueerd in het licht van de gereformeerde schriftleer. Ook zal zij worden getest door middel van een virtuele confrontatie en dialoog met de hermeneutische theorieën van Kwame Bediako en R. Sugirtharajah, die respectievelijk in een multireligieuze en postkoloniale context zijn ontwikkeld. Tenslotte zal Vanhoozers hermeneutische theologie worden getoetst door de praktische consequenties ervan te bezien binnen het domein van het begraven in een multireligieuze context.

De voorgaande overwegingen leiden tot de volgende hoofdonderzoeksvraag en opzet van deze studie: "**Op welke manieren kan de hermeneutische theorie van Vanhoozer bijdragen aan een theologie die contextueel relevant is voor de Indische context, terwijl de gereformeerde visie op het gezag van de Schrift getrouw gehandhaafd blijft?".** Deze hoofdonderzoeksvraag vormt de leidraad voor de deelvragen in de verschillende hoofdstukken. De onderzoeksvraag die het tweede hoofdstuk stuurt is: **"Op welke manier gaat Vanhoozers hermeneutische theorie in op hermeneutische en contextuele uitdagingen en in hoeverre slaagt hij erin de traditie van een gereformeerde visie op de Schrift voort te zetten?".** De onderzoeksvraag die het derde hoofdstuk stuurt is: **"In hoeverre bevestigt, weerspreekt of verbetert een interactie met Bediako's Afrikaanse hermeneutiek Vanhoozers hermeneutisch model, vooral met betrekking tot het potentieel ervan om binnen een multireligieuze context te interageren?"** Het vierde hoofdstuk onderzoekt: **"In hoeverre bevestigt, weerspreekt of verbetert een interactie met Sugirtharajah's postkoloniale Aziatische hermeneutiek Vanhoozers hermeneutisch model, vooral met betrekking tot zijn potentiële gevoeligheid voor de rol van machtsstructuren in de Indiase context?".** Het onderzoek culmineert met het vijfde hoofdstuk waarin de volgende vraag wordt gesteld: **"Hoe resulteert een analyse van Vanhoozers hermeneutiek, scherp gesteld

door de interactie met de hermeneutiek van zowel Bediako als Sugirtharajah, in een bevredigende uitbreiding van de gereformeerde leer van de Schrift, en een hermeneutische theologie die relevant is voor de Indiase context, vooral met betrekking tot begrafenispraktijken in deze multireligieuze context?"

Het tweede hoofdstuk behandelt Vanhoozers hermeneutische theorie en zijn antwoord op hermeneutische en contextuele uitdagingen, en gaat dieper in op de gereformeerde visie op de Schrift. Benadrukt moet worden dat de belangrijkste theologische argumenten van dit hoofdstuk gebaseerd zijn op Vanhoozers theologische hermeneutiek zoals deze in *The Drama of Doctrine* naar voren wordt gebracht. Vanhoozer definieert theologische hermeneutiek als het onderscheiden van het discours van de communicatieve actie van de Drie-enige God in de Bijbel. Hij noemt de Bijbel "Schrift" omdat daarin een goddelijke auteursbedoeling aanwezig is, die niet in strijd is met de communicatieve bedoelingen van de menselijke auteur maar daarvan juist gebruik maakt. Vanhoozer ontwikkelde zijn theologische hermeneutiek door zowel de uitdagingen aan te gaan van de moderniteit, die zich sterk maakte met haar eigen redeneervermogen en wetenschappelijke methode, als van de postmoderniteit, die wantrouwend stond tegenover de categorieën rede, metanarratief en individuele autonomie. Als antwoord op de moderniteit pleitte de postmoderniteit voor het lokaliseren van taal binnen menselijke ervaringshorizonten, en voor het honoreren van uiteenlopende lokale menselijke verhalen/narratieven en hun culturele praktijken en handelingen. De postmoderniteit integreerde ook een uitdaging van de contextuele theologie met haar nadruk op geschiedenis en traditie, maatschappij en praktijk, en haar herontdekking van de eigen culturele identiteit. Vanhoozer benadrukt expliciet dat noch de moderniteit noch de postmoderniteit zijn theologische agenda heeft bepaald, maar deze slechts heeft geïnitieerd. Zijn antwoord is er niet een van een compromis tussen deze drie, maar eerder een dispuut met hun methode en de inhoud van hun hermeneutiek. Toch past hij zich aan hun methode aan in zijn Theologische hermeneutiek, doordat hij daarin de menselijke rede en creativiteit integreert binnen de goddelijke openbaring en het goddelijk gebod. Bovendien stelt hij een weg voor die alle uitdagingen van de moderniteit, de postmoderniteit en de contextuele theologie in zich opneemt. Deze weg is "de wending naar drama", die alle voorgaande methoden met elkaar mengt en laat resulteren in één richting. Vanhoozer stelt dat de drama-metafoor congruent is met het concept 'verlossing' omdat verlossing ook een speech-act omvat. Het drama is de communicatieve actie van God in de geschiedenis; het cultiveert de geest van Christus en het houdt in het waarnemen van en optreden in een wereld die vol is van verlangen. Vanhoozer selecteert elementen van het concept 'drama' die verenigbaar zijn met het verlossingsverhaal, analogieën die duidelijke punten daarvan weergeven en in harmonie zijn met de Schrift. Enkele elementen van de drama-metafoor die Vanhoozer overneemt in het Theo-drama zijn: het evangelie als drama, de canon als script, de leer als regie, de Heilige Geest als hoofdregisseur, kerkelijke functionarissen (zoals bisschoppen, ouderlingen en vooral predikanten) als assistent-regisseurs, en theologen als dramaturgen.

Na een beschrijving van de methodologie geeft het onderzoek aan hoe Vanhoozer verschillende theologische categorieën naar voren brengt in wisselwerking met een gereformeerde theologie over de Schrift. Hij herformuleert

de inspiratie van de Schrift als "een kwestie van aansporing door de Geest aan de menselijke auteurs om precies te zeggen wat de goddelijke toneelschrijver bedoelde".[21] De metafoor van aansporing in dit geherformuleerde begrip impliceert "getuigen, aansporen, bijstaan, in herinnering roepen, het juiste woord geven en verwoorden".[22] In een vergelijkbaar betoog herdefinieert Vanhoozer de canonvorming niet alleen als "alleen goddelijk geopenbaarde informatie, maar een geheel van goddelijke communicatieve praktijken waarin de Geest de kerk trekt om deel te nemen en zo inzicht te krijgen."[23] In zijn Theologische hermeneutiek wordt het gezag van de Schrift gezien in de drie-eenheid van Gods communicatieve handelen: locutie, illocutie en perlocutie. Dit betekent: "De ultieme autoriteit voor de christelijke theologie is de drie-enige God die 'spreekt-handelt' in de Schrift."[24] In een vergelijkbare toonzetting herformuleert Vanhoozer de *suffificiëntie* (toereikendheid) van de Schrift door te stellen dat de Schrift toereikend is in die zin dat de mens op God kan reageren en "de beloften kan vertrouwen, de bevelen kan gehoorzamen, de waarschuwingen in acht kan nemen, de liederen kan zingen, de beweringen kan geloven en kan hopen op het einde."[25] Vanhoozers geherformuleerde theologie over de Schrift blijkt daarmee uit vijf stellingen van Theologische hermeneutiek, die zowel het optreden van de drie-enige God als dat van de menselijke auteurs honoreren. Vanhoozer probeert niet alleen het werk van God in de Schriftleer onder de aandacht te brengen, zoals traditionele theologieën doen. Maar hij benadrukt ook het prominente karakter van de rol van de menselijke auteurs en de functie van literaire genres, die een belangrijke plaats innemen in een postmoderne visie op de Schrift. In feite wordt Vanhoozers nadruk op God (Goddelijk handelen) bij het voortbrengen van de Schrift gelokaliseerd binnen het Drie-enig werk van God, met een betekenisvolle nadruk op de rol van de Heilige Geest die de menselijke auteurs aanstuurde. Het is opmerkelijk hoe Vanhoozer hiermee de gereformeerde theologie over de Schrift herneemt en uitbreidt.

Vervolgens past Vanhoozer zijn methodologie en uitbreiding van de gereformeerde Schriftleer toe op zijn hermeneutische theologie. Vanhoozer stelt "een zesvoudige weg" voor als een canonisch-linguïstische benadering om zijn hermeneutische theologie te implementeren. Het eerste facet van die weg is zijn *postpropositionalistische* benadering. Hij definieert,

> Postpropositionalist theology insists that there is more to Scripture than revealed propositions, more than separate divine thoughts, more even than a system of divine thoughts. It is in this sense that postpropositionalist theology is pluralistic. Yet an immediate qualification is in order, for the post in propositionalist does not mean against but beyond. There is more, not less, in the canon than propositional revelation.[26]

Ten tweede beschouwt de *postconservatieve* theologie openbaring als meer dan het doorgeven van informatie of proposities. Vanhoozer ondermijnt het propositionele aspect van de openbaring niet, maar benadrukt dat het werk van de

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[21] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Het drama van de leer: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 227.
[22] Vanhoozer, 227.
[23] Vanhoozer, 229.
[24] Vanhoozer, 67.
[25] Vanhoozer, 291.
[26] Vanhoozer, 276.

openbaring meer is dan het openbaren van informatie. De goddelijke communicatie-act is ook een persoonlijke ontmoeting, en bedoeld voor de opbouw van de relatie tussen God en mensen. Zij overstijgt de dichotomieën tussen verwijzen en uitdrukken, en tussen 'God zeggen' en 'God doen'. Berry bestempelt Vanhoozers postconservatieve benadering als "Redemptive-Historical speech act".[27] Ten derde koestert de *postfoundationalistische* benadering van theologie noch "propositionele waarheden die dienen als fundament voor kennis", noch accepteert zij het geloof van de kerkgemeenschap of welke gemeenschap dan ook als fundament. In plaats daarvan tracht zij "vast te houden aan de idealen van waarheid, objectiviteit en rationaliteit, terwijl zij tegelijkertijd de voorlopige, contextuele en feilbare aard van de menselijke rede erkent."[28] Ten vierde "tracht de *prozaïsche* theologie de gewoonten van zien, denken en proeven te leren die inherent zijn aan de diverse literaire vormen van de Schrift en deze voort te zetten in even gewone levensvormen. Want het zijn juist onze alledaagse levenspatronen die gewoonten vormen. Gewoonten, op hun beurt, vormen karakter; en karakter, zoals we weten, is plot."[29] Dit vierde aspect is gebaseerd op de postpropositionalistische en postconservatieve benaderingen van het lezen van de Schrift. Ten vijfde is er de *phronetische* benadering van theologie. Verschillende termen zoals praktische rede, goed oordeel en *prudentia* worden door Vanhoozer gebruikt om phronesis uit te leggen. De phronetische benadering is het vermogen om in specifieke contexten een goed oordeel te vellen, dat door de Schrift wordt opgeroepen en gevoed.[30] De zesde is de *profetische* benadering van theologie. Een profetische benadering van theologie speelt de rol van profeet, zoals wij deze tegenkomen in het Oude Testament. Wanneer de kerk bij het aanpakken van contextuele problemen wegdwaalt van het theo-drama, treedt de profetische theologie op namens God. Na een analyse is de conclusie van het onderzoek dat Vanhoozer de gereformeerde traditie aangaande de Schrift niet verwerpt, maar trouw overeind houdt. Hij is het echter niet eens met sommige accenten die erin meekomen, en ontwikkelt verder wat onderbelicht is gebleven. Hoewel Vanhoozer daardoor bijstellingen aanbrengt in de gereformeerde traditie, moet deze herformulering worden gezien als een verrijking of uitbreiding van de gereformeerde traditie in een postmoderne context. Op grond van de analyse bevestigt het hoofdstuk de hypothese dat Vanhoozers hermeneutische theologie de hermeneutische en contextuele uitdagingen van zowel de moderniteit als de postmoderniteit op een relevante en adequate wijze heeft aangepakt.

Het derde hoofdstuk analyseert de hermeneutische theologie van Vanhoozer met betrekking tot haar potentie binnen een multireligieuze context. Dat gebeurt door een vergelijking met de Afrikaanse hermeneutiek van Bediako. Bediako is een Ghanese theoloog die zich verbonden wist met gereformeerde en presbyteriaanse theologen wereldwijd, terwijl hij tegelijk pleitte voor een

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[27] C Everett Berry, "Theological vs. Methodological Postconservatism: Stanley Grenz and Kevin Vanhoozer as Test Cases," *Westminster Theological Journal* 69, no. 1 (March 1, 2007): 115.

[28] F. LeRon Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology: Wolfhart Pannenberg and the New Theological Rationality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 58; in Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 29.

[29] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 310.

[30] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Theological Education and the Church: The School of Theodrama," *International Theological Education for the 21st Century*, n.d., part three.

afrikanisering van het christendom. Bij het improviseren van de hermeneutische theologie in Afrika benaderde Bediako het evangelie als omvattend. Zijn benadering combineert de culturele, sociale en religieuze categorieën van de Bijbel en de Afrikaanse context tot één geheel: het Akan-verhaal. Naast de Schrift zelf bestaat het preïncarnatieve werk van de Schrift, waartoe de kennis van God in de Afrikaanse Traditionele Religie (ATR), de *grassroots*-theologie (mondelinge theologie uitgedrukt in de geschriften van leken in Afrika), en de voortzetting van de openbaring in de Afrikaanse christelijke ervaring van Christus behoren. De Schrift wordt gezien als een prisma dat nieuwe lichtstralen werpt op de cultuur en de traditie in Afrika. Dit beeld impliceert dat de centrale rol van de Schrift van fundamenteel belang is om een nieuwe dimensie van de Afrikaanse cultuur en identiteit in beeld te brengen, in tegenstelling tot gangbare zendingsmethoden waarbij de Schriftteksten doorgaans werden gebruikt als lens of bril om de Afrikaanse cultuur te evalueren en vaak te demoniseren.[31] Op basis van zijn hermeneutische theologie presenteert Bediako Jezus als de hoogste voorouder, de voorouder bij uitstek. Bediako betoogt dat Christus "op grond van zijn menswording, dood, opstanding en hemelvaart naar de sfeer van de geest-kracht, in Afrikaanse termen terecht kan worden aangeduid als voorouder, ja zelfs als hoogste voorouder."[32]

Uit de analyse blijkt dat Bediako Vanhoozers stellingname met betrekking tot de 'speech-act" theorie bevestigt, omdat de Bijbel in de vertaalde Schrift Gods Woord wordt wanneer de lezer verlicht wordt door de Heilige Geest. Bediako beschouwt de oorspronkelijke autograaf als abstract, in tegenstelling tot Vanhoozer, die de oorspronkelijke autograaf (canon) als Gods Woord beschouwt, zelfs wanneer deze zijn bestemming niet vindt in een bepaalde context. Bediako volgt het Vanhoozeriaanse principe van het herdefiniëren/heiligen van prozaïsche termen in de weg van improvisatie. Hij gebruikt lokale metaforen om het gezag van de Schrift te verduidelijken. Bediako doet dit door de continuïteit ervan met bestaande religieuze elementen te benadrukken in plaats van de discontinuïteit. Door te improviseren, bevestigt Bediako ook Vanhoozers aandringen op een theologie die gebaseerd is op meer dan alleen maar proposities die afgeleid zijn uit de Bijbel. Bediako verschilt van Vanhoozer door de Afrikaanse kerk een eigen kerkelijke autonomie toe te kennen. Vanhoozer stelt dat geen enkele taal of cultuur zich kan verheffen tot exclusieve norm voor de kerk; de canon heeft het alleenrecht als normerende norm.[33] Als Vanhoozer streeft naar "kerstening van de lokale religieuze ervaring", dan streeft Bediako naar "Afrikanisering van de christelijke ervaring": Jezus als bemiddelaar, Heer, regerende 'chief' en Hoogste Voorouder over andere goden en geesten. In deze virtuele evaluatie van Vanhoozer door Bediako bevestigt de laatste dat meerdere Vanhoozeriaanse hermeneutische elementen, en zijn leer over de Schrift relevant zijn voor een multireligieuze context. Het onderzoek in dit derde hoofdstuk concludeert dan ook dat Vanhoozers hermeneutische theorie en gereformeerde Schriftleer in bevredigende mate betrouwbaar, relevant en passend zijn voor een multireligieuze context.

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[31] Kwame Bediako, "Scripture as the Interpreter of Culture and Tradition," in *Africa Bible Commentary*, ed. Tokunboh. WordAlive Publishers/ Zondervan, 2006), 7.

[32] Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh/Maryknoll, NY: Edinburgh University Press/Orbis Books, 1995), 217.

[33] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 319.

Het vierde hoofdstuk onderzoekt de volgende vraag: "In hoeverre bevestigt, weerspreekt of verbetert een interactie met Sugirtharajah's postkoloniale hermeneutiek Vanhoozers hermeneutisch model, vooral met betrekking tot zijn potentiële gevoeligheid voor de rol van machtsstructuren in de theologie?". De 'alomtegenwoordige' R.S. Sugirtharajah, zoals veel postkoloniale denkers hem noemen, wil "de persoon van Jezus, in samenhang met andere religieuze figuren, brengen in een revitaliserende en verrijkende ontmoeting met hen en met het christelijk geloof zelf."[34] Hij heeft pionierswerk gericht door zijn hele bijbelse en theologische studie te laten draaien om postkoloniale bijbelkritiek. Vanhoozer en Sugirtharajah zijn beiden belangrijke grote namen vanwege hun inzet voor hermeneutische exploratie, waarbij zij zich vanuit verschillende contextuele trajecten richten op het gezag van de Schrift. Zij hebben een gedeelde agenda waar het gaat om het redden van de Schrift uit machtsstructuren en het laten zien dat de taak van de theologie niet alleen informatief maar ook transformerend is. Zij staan echter tegenover elkaar wat betreft de inhoud, de bron en het doel van deze transformatie.

Uit de analyse van het hoofdstuk blijkt dat Sugirtharajah's theologie een afkeuring inhoudt van Vanhoozers fundamentele geloof in de exclusieve verlossende aanspraken van Jezus Christus, zijn theologische en trinitarische hermeneutiek, zijn visie over de *magisterial* en *ministerial* autoriteit van de Schrift en de *ministerial* rol van de kerk. Toch bevestigen Sugirtharajah's hermeneutische strategieën de Vanhoozaanse hermeneutische theologie en brengen deze zelfs verder. Sugirtharajah bevestigt onder meer Vanhoozers opmerkingen over machtsstructuren in toepassingen van het Schriftgezag. Van belang te noteren is het dat Sugirtharajah's verwijt ten aanzien van de westerse overheersing bij de theologische vorming van de visie op het Schriftgezag door Vanhoozer goed zou worden begrepen.[35] Meer nog, Sugirtharajah is het zelfs eens met Vanhoozers argument wanneer hij wijst op de contextuele en culturele beperkingen van de westerse theologie.[36] Sugirtharajah bevestigt ook de geldigheid van Vanhoozers argument om prozaïsche metaforen te gebruiken in de hermeneutiek. Sugirtharajah gebruikt deze metaforen echter om 'gaps', afwezigheden en disbalansen tussen religieuze teksten aan het licht te brengen, en om de opvatting te bestrijden dat een tekst een definitieve en voor altijd geldende betekenis heeft.[37] Sugirtharajah deelt Vanhoozers verzet tegen een westerse hermeneutische strategie die louter gebaseerd is op uit de Bijbel afgeleide proposities en beweringen. Hij bevestigt verder Vanhoozers kritische observatie dat deze methode sterk beïnvloed is door de moderne wetenschappelijke methodologie en ontwikkeld is om tegemoet te komen aan de behoeften van de

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[34] R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations: An Alternative Way of Reading the Bible and Doing Theology* (Londen: SCM Press, 2003), 5.

[35] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), Mission in the modern west: Discovery and Domination. eBook format.

[36] Vanhoozer, Our big fat Greek method: What are they saying about western theological thought? eBook format.

[37] R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: History, Method, Practice*, 1 editie (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 143; R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Troublesome Texts: The Bible in Colonial and Contemporary Culture* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press Ltd, 2008), 146.

moderne tijd. Verder hebben Vanhoozer en Sugirtharajah er beiden met kracht op gewezen hoe het Euro-Amerikaanse verstaan elke religieuze syncretistische praktijk van hun eigen kant in de eigen seculier-westerse context heeft ontkend, maar intussen wel hardnekkig het religieuze syncretisme dat in religieus pluralistische contexten aan de orde is, aan de kaak stelt.[38] Sugirtharajah bevestigt ook Vanhoozers argument van een noodzakelijke wisselwerking tussen globaal en lokaal bij de improvisatie. Hij behandelt echter alle religies en religieuze teksten als gelijkwaardig en gezaghebbend, zodat deze teksten uit verschillende heilige verhalen op elkaar mogen inwerken, elkaar corrigeren en aanvullen. Jezus wordt slechts gezien als een wijsheidsleraar, één onder vele anderen. Sugirtharajah's voorstel staat lijnrecht tegenover Vanhoozers kritisch syncretisme. Een ander Vanhoozeriaans hermeneutisch element, dat in het werk van Sugirtharajah een sterke bevestiging heeft gevonden, is de volkstaal-hermeneutiek. Sugirtharajah verbindt bijbelteksten en culturele scheidslijnen door conceptuele parallellen tussen de Schrift en andere religies. Zo wil hij licht werpen op de Schrift zodat de kloof tussen de bijbelteksten en de lokale cultuur kan worden overbrugd. Daarbij verwerpt Sugirtharajah Vanhoozers geloof in de autoriteit van de Schrift door zowel het kerkelijke optreden als de Bijbel te beschouwen als koloniale apparaten. In deze virtuele evaluatie van Vanhoozer door Sugirtharajah bevestigt deze laatste verschillende Vanhoozeriaanse hermeneutische elementen, die binnen de Schriftleer functioneren, als relevant voor een multireligieuze context. Het vierde hoofdstuk concludeert dat Vanhoozers hermeneutische strategieën de rol van machtsstructuren in een multireligieuze context overtuigend aan de orde stellen.

In het vijfde hoofdstuk wordt de hermeneutische theologie van Vanhoozer (nadat deze met behulp van Bediako en Sugirtharajah is getoetst) toegepast op begrafenisrituelen in een multireligieuze en postkoloniale context. Het in de eerdere hoofdstukken gearrangeerde hermeneutische gesprek tussen Vanhoozer (nu via één van zijn medewerkers), Bediako en Sugirtharajah wordt hier in een op de omgang met cultureel-religieuze begrafenispraktijken toegespitste vorm herhaald. In dat verband besteedt het onderzoek extra aandacht aan de achtergronden en betekenis van Hindoe-begrafenisrituelen. Daarnaast schetst het onderzoek binnen de gereformeerde traditie een decor voor Vanhoozers benadering met behulp van Calvijns opvattingen over begraven. Dit onderdeel resulteert in uitgewerkte suggesties aan Indiase christenen voor begrafenispraktijken in een hindoeïstische context. Verder concludeert het onderzoek hoe de geherformuleerde leer van de Schrift en de hermeneutische theologie daarbij relevant blijken voor de gereformeerde traditie in India. Een benadering in de lijn van Vanhoozer blijkt geen probleem te hebben met het gebruik van trendy en creatieve begrafenisrituelen zolang de betekenis van dood, oordeel, Christus' overwinning op de dood en het leven na de dood zoals in de Bijbel gepresenteerd, niet in het gedrang komen. De test van Vanhoozers benadering via Bediako bevestigt Vanhoozer's nadruk op de bijbelse betekenis van dood en begrafenis en het toestaan van creatieve manieren van begraven zolang de rituelen het geleefde leven vieren en de dood van de geliefde eren. Hij bevestigt ook Vanhoozers terughoudendheid bij het toestaan van extravagante

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[38] Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All," Exaggeration "the one": religious globalization, eBook format; R. S. Sugirtharajah, "Reconceiving Jesus: Some Continuing Concerns," in *Asian Faces of Jesus*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1993), 260.

begrafenisrituelen. Hij acht extravagante begrafenispraktijken alleen toelaatbaar als deze het evangelie niet overschaduwen. Ook bij de test van Vanhoozers benadering via Sugirtharajah concludeert het onderzoek dat Sugirtharajah Vanhoozer bevestigt wanneer deze zich richt op het troosten van de nabestaanden tijdens de begrafenis. Vanhoozer stemt in met het geven van troost, niet alleen via de Bijbel, maar ook via andere – eventueel extravagante - culturele gewoonten tijdens de begrafenis, mits deze de betekenis van leven, dood en opstanding op basis van de Bijbel omvatten. Sugirtharajah verschilt van Vanhoozer in zijn nadruk op de bron van vrede en troost voor de nabestaanden omdat hij gebruik maakt van diverse heilige teksten, gebeden en gebruiken uit verschillende religies om de nabestaanden te troosten, terwijl Vanhoozer vertrouwt op Jezus als de enige trooster en gever van leven na de dood. De hermeneutische theologie van Vanhoozer stelt de gereformeerde traditie in India in staat om in de eigen sociaal-religieuze context geschikte begrafenispraktijken te improviseren om de overledene te eren en te respecteren, zolang de onderscheidende kenmerken van het christelijk geloof gehandhaafd blijven. Het onderzoek concludeert dat de hermeneutische theologie van Vanhoozer relevant is voor de uitdagingen met betrekking tot begrafenispraktijken in een multireligieuze context, omdat zijn benadering geen gedetailleerde methode vastlegt, maar organisch van aard is. Zijn methode bevordert het gebruik van metaforen, religieuze conceptuele instrumenten en creativiteit in begrafenispraktijken in dienst van sociale harmonie. Daarbij ligt de nadruk op de betekenis van de dood, het oordeel, de overwinning van Christus op de dood en het leven na de dood, thema's die zich ontwikkelen in het theodrama.

Dit vijfdehoofdstuk toont ook de relevantie van Vanhoozers herformulering van de Schriftleer, in overeenstemming met de gereformeerde traditie, voor gereformeerde tradities in India. Aangezien gereformeerde kerken in India de *Westminster Confession of faith* als belijdenisverklaring hanteert, beperkte het onderzoek zich tot dit document om de uitbreiding van Vanhoozer en de relevantie ervan voor India te laten zien. Vanhoozer heeft het schriftgezag, dat geopenbaarde goddelijke informatie (inhoud) vastlegt in de woorden van anderen zoals profeten, koningen, apostelen, discipelen, gelovigen en ongelovigen (vormen), geherformuleerd. De betekenis van het leggen van nadruk op het gezag van de literaire vormen samen met de inhoud is daarin gelegen dat dit de gelovige niet alleen tot een beter begrip leidt, maar ook in staat stelt tot een theologisch oordeel vanuit het evangelie in elke mogelijke context. Deze uitbreiding van de visie op de inspiratie van de Schrift wordt bevestigd door inzicht in het werk van de Heilige Geest, die de bijbelse tekst aan mensen toevertrouwt, autoriseert en tot de zijne maakt door de menselijke auteurs ertoe aan te zetten precies te zeggen wat de Drie-enige God bedoelde.[39] Deze herziene definitie benadrukt het organische proces van inspiratie en waarschuwt de kerk voor het gevaar de Bijbel af te schilderen als een bovennatuurlijk boek zonder enig verband met de wereld, en de bijbelse tekst als een surrogaat goddelijke actor. Dit accent verkleint daarmee het gevaar van bibliolatrie. De genoegzaamheid van de Schrift wordt op een nieuwe manier in beeld gebracht door de nadruk op het vertellen van het ware verhaal over de wereld en de relatie daarvan met de participatie van de wereld in

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[39] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 227.

Gods werken.[40] Dit houdt in: vertrouwen op Zijn beloften, gehoorzamen aan de geboden, acht slaan op de waarschuwingen, geloven in de beweringen en hopen op de beloofde afloop.

Het hoofdstuk concludeert ook dat de Vanhoozeriaanse zesvoudige weg in de hermeneutische theologie relevant is voor India. Ten eerste autoriseert de postpropositionalistische benadering zowel literaire genres als proposities: vorm en inhoud die ons niet alleen informeren over Christus, maar ons in Christus vormen tot bekwame getuigen van Christus. Ten tweede creëert de postfoundationalistische benadering ruimte voor een liefdevolle, gunnende, bescheiden, contrapuntische benadering van andere godsdiensten en hun interpretatiekaders die zowel het geloof van christenen met deze religieuze achtergrond als de leer over God versterken. Zij bevestigt ook het bijbelse getuigenis en geeft de tekst een nieuwe plaats binnen een Christocentrisch kader. Deze benadering van theologie verrijkt ons begrip van spiritualiteit, de vorming van publieke, sociale en medische ethiek, en versterkt de sociale harmonie. Ten derde benadrukt de postconservatieve benadering de gelijktijdigheid van de *magisterial* autoriteit van de Schrift en de dienstbaarheid van de interpreterende gemeenschap (ecclesia) bij het onderscheiden en zich toe-eigenen van het theodrama in hedendaagse situaties. Ten vierde houdt de prozaïsche benadering de risico's van cultuurrelativisme, kolonialisme en absolutisme in de improvisatie in toom. Ten vijfde helpt de phronetische benadering de kerk in India bij de improvisatie van theodrama. Dit gebeurt niet door louter replicatie (herhaling van de Schrift) of innovatie (afwijking van de Schrift), maar door inculcatie en voeding door de Schrift. In die weg kan de kerk, aangedreven door de Heilige Geest, doordrenkt worden met interpretatieve deugden en theodramatische vorming. Ten zesde confronteert en corrigeert de profetische theologie de Indiase kerk wanneer syncretisme dreigt. Zij protesteert ook wanneer de kerk het evangelie opoffert door te capituleren voor intellectuele, culturele, sociale en politieke machten.

Het zesde hoofdstuk biedt een kort overzicht ter afsluiting van het proefschrift. Het proefschrift bevestigt de hypothese dat gereformeerde theologie in staat is om de contextuele uitdagingen aan te gaan die religieus pluralisme en postkolonialiteit vormen voor de gereformeerde kerk in India, zonder de gereformeerde leer van de Schrift te ondermijnen. Dit proefschrift bevestigt dat de hermeneutische theologie van Kevin Vanhoozer een relevant gereformeerd hermeneutisch model is dat trouw blijft aan de gereformeerde leer van de Schrift en tegelijkertijd de contextuele behoeften van de gereformeerde kerken in India aanspreekt.

Via een bespreking van twee theologen wordt de geldigheid van de Vanhoozeriaanse hermeneutische theologie getest en bevestigd. Bediako bevestigt dat de Vanhoozeriaanse hermeneutische theologie relevant en nuttig is binnen religieuze pluralistische contexten. En hoewel Sugirtharajah het Vanhoozeriaanse trinitaire kader en Vanhoozer's theologie van de autoriteit van de Schrift niet deelt, bevestigt hij wel Vanhoozeriaanse hermeneutische strategieën die religieuze en westerse machtsstructuren kunnen belichten en aanpakken. Verder bevestigt

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[40] Vanhoozer en Treier, *Theology and the Mirror of Scripture: A Mere Evangelical Account*, Scripture as the mirror of truth: Canonical reflection, eBook format.

het onderzoek dat de Vanhoozeriaanse hermeneutische theologie relevant is voor het behandelen van begrafenisrituelen in een multireligieuze context. Op basis van deze Vanhoozeriaanse hermeneutische theologie worden in het onderzoek drie verschillende manieren voorgesteld om begrafenisrituelen in een christelijk-hindoeïstische context te improviseren.

Het onderzoek culmineert, in interactie met de Westminster Confession of faith, in een Vanhoozeriaanse herformulering van het Schriftgezag voor de Gereformeerde kerken in India. Verder bevestigt het ook de relevantie van de zes aspecten van Vanhoozers canoniek-linguïstische benadering van contextuele theologie voor de Gereformeerde kerken in India.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Practical Challenges Which Require a Contextually Relevant Theology

This dissertation aims to contribute towards a hermeneutical method which is contextually relevant to the Indian context and faithful to the Reformed acknowledgment of Scriptural authority.

The quest for such a hermeneutical study springs from contextual challenges faced in India and other countries which are predominantly multi-religious and postcolonial. Specific practical stories of burial or cremation in a multi-religious context will highlight the challenges Christian believers have to face. As A. Scott Moreau fittingly puts it, "Perhaps one of the best ways to introduce contextualization is to tell a story."[41] The story starts with an autobiographical note about participation in cremation and the challenges involved in it, followed by similar examples from India, China, Nepal and Africa.

I come from a Hindu family. In 1992, I was baptized, and became part of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in India. One question that had always troubled me since I was baptized was, "As a Christian, how am I going to fulfil the Hindu cremation rituals that are expected of me when my parents die?" However, I never actively engaged in looking for an answer, thinking I had enough time, since my parents were young. When I joined seminary, I tentatively posed this question to my professors. One of my professors startled me with his answer. He said, "Do not participate in the cremation, you cannot resist syncretism. It is insurmountable." Sadly, at that time in my context, neither ecclesia nor academia was addressing this everyday contextual issue. In 2004, my father died. I was the only son, and as such I was responsible for his cremation and the observation of all the Hindu rituals. Having an intimate knowledge of the requirements of the cremation, I dreaded what I would have to do.[42] Many times I wished that I could

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[41] A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions: Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2012), 17 Google books.

[42] According to Rig Veda 10.16.1, cremation is an extremely important ritual for Hindus. They believe it releases an individual's spiritual essence from its transitory physical body so it can be reborn; if it is not done or not done properly, it is thought that the soul will be disturbed and not find its way to its proper place in the afterlife and come back and haunt living relatives. Fire is the chosen method to dispose of the dead because of its association with purity and its power to scare away harmful ghosts, demons and spirits. The fire god Agni is asked to consume the physical body and create its essence in heaven in preparation for transmigration. He who does good will be born good, he who does evil will be born evil as it is written in Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.4.2-6; 4.3 33. Jeffrey Hays, "Hindu Funeral, Cremation and Varanasi," accessed September 6, 2012, http://factsanddetails.com/world.php?itemid=1343&catid=55&subcatid=354 Various other rituals are performed, along with the recited mantras during the cremation. Many religious symbols and articles like flowers, fruits, green bamboo frames, coconut, and Ganges water are used during the cremation. The Ashes are collected and immersed in the holy river. After the cremation, the son has to organise a prayer meeting for the peaceful resting of the soul. There are many more

just leave and forsake my family responsibilities. I could call it a sacrifice for the Lord. Should I not leave my father and mother and follow Him (Matthew 10:37, Luke 14:26)? I considered leaving, but my mother wept inconsolably, asking me to fulfil the crematory rituals or else the soul of her husband would not rest in peace, and would start disturbing the family and the society. I had no idea how I could lead a Hindu crematory ceremony without compromising my faith. In this most difficult time in my life, as a Christian, I led the cremation of my father observing Hindu crematory rituals. While I did so, all along, I cried to the Lord and prayed like Naaman, "I will honour my parents even in death, and while I do so if by mistake I stumble, Lord please pardon your servant" (see Naaman's prayer from 2 Kings 5: 18). This event was the most difficult time in my life, both mentally and spiritually. It was followed by a period of guilt, confusion, frustration, and helplessness, as well as hatred towards the Christian community for being left alone during this difficult time.[43] After finishing all the rituals, I returned to the Christian community I belonged to. Many people expressed their displeasure over my participation in my father's cremation. Yet several of them mirrored my confusion because they too had no idea what the appropriate behaviour would be in such a situation.

In 2017, a more recent example occurred in the life of a relative of mine. His Hindu father died suddenly. Since there was no ecclesial or academic guidance to carry out Hindu crematory rites in a way that would be true to the authority of Scripture and yet address the contextual concerns, my relative paid his neighbours to carry out the Hindu crematory rites on his behalf. He refrained from the crematory rituals because he was scared that through this crematory participation, he would sin against God.

In other Asian countries Christians face comparable challenges. For example**,** Xinmei, a Fujian Protestant Christian girl from China stayed away from her grandfather's funeral because a Taoist priest conducted his funeral. Although Xinmei's grandfather became a Christian during the last few days of his life, his conversion was not accepted. The fact of the matter is that Xinmei and her sister did not go to the cremation, because for them, true Christians would never participate in these rituals. Herman Abraham Colijn, in his field research asks Xinmei,

> [Colijn] As a Christian, do you feel that you can participate in these rituals [grandfather's traditional funeral]?
> [Xinmei] My sister and I did not participate because we are Christians and because we are women. The men have to perform all these rituals. We only had to cry and to kneel before the corpse. We did not do this, however. Our relatives got very angry. They said that surely, Christians can participate in traditional rituals. They did not understand. Some

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religious practices associated with death in Hinduism. Since, religious beliefs and practices are not the goal of this research, I will not give details of other rituals during a Hindu funeral ceremony.

[43] This is how I participated in Hindu crematory rituals of my father. For details refer to: Ramesh Chand, "Part 1 & 2: A Hindu-Christian Funeral: Interfaith Dialogue or Capitulation?," Fuller Theological Seminary: Evangelical Interfaith Dialogue, Fall 2012, http://cms.fuller.edu/EIFD/issues/Fall_2012/A_Hindu-Christian_Funeral_Part_1.aspx.

relatives also claimed to be Christians, and said 'look, we are also Christians and we can participate'. But I don't think they are real believers.[44]

Colijn explains the reasons behind Xinmei's resistance in the burial participation. He reports that Xinmei's decision of resistance was influenced by modernity, western culture and the combination of Protestant church instruction and her personal choice.[45]

In another instance, Sharma records a shattering incident in Nepal where a new convert, a young Christian boy from a Hindu background, organized a Christian burial for his mother, who was also a new convert. This did not go well with their Hindu relatives, who forcefully exhumed the body of his Christian mother and pushed him to cremate it according to the Hindu rituals. The Hindu family members of the young boy felt that due to the Christian funeral rites, the mother's soul did not rest in peace, and hence haunted the village. Even worse, when the young man kept himself away from the Christian community due to the guilt of sinning against God, Christians asked him to repent for his actions (participating in the Hindu cremation), and return to Christianity.[46] However, consumed by guilt, the young boy never returned to his Christian faith. Sharma further observes that new converts, in their zealous fervour, usually do not think about the social, cultural and religious repercussions, and those who contemplate future consequences often do not respond in favour of the Christian faith.[47] Sharma, in his research, records three more incidents of Hindu burials where Christians performed the last rites. According to his research, a common pattern in all three funerary rituals was that Christian believers were left on their own to decide what to adopt and reject while participating in the Hindu funeral ritual.[48]

Besides these examples from the Asian context, many African Christians face parallel dilemmas. It seems to be a common practice for many Christians in Ghana to join their fellow-citizens in spending extravagantly on the funeral service, pleasing the deceased, so that the deceased can be a source of blessing to the family who are left behind. De Sam Lazaro substantiates this,

> At the root of all this [funeral custom] is a strong tradition — of honoring, even worshipping ancestors, says Ablade. Grand funerals are a way for the living to please the newly departed elder, to continue the communion with those who went before and to ask for blessings. … They will start calling upon him [the departed soul], "Hey, send us something, this week, things are not so good…[49]

The above crematory stories from the religiously pluralistic contexts of India, Nepal, China and Africa may seem like isolated incidents. However, the common

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[44] Herman Abraham Colijn, "Protestant Death Ritual Negotiation in Fujian: The Effects of Protestant Conversion on Chinese Funerals" (Amsterdam, Unpublished Master's Thesis, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2011), 9.

[45] Colijn, 23.

[46] Bal Krishna Sharma, *Christian Identity and Funerary Rites in Nepal* (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2013), Funerary rites in the Nepalese Church. eBook format.

[47] Sharma, eBook format.

[48] Sharma, Interviews of Christians from Hindu background: eBook format.

[49] Fred de Sam Lazaro, "Fantasy Coffins in Ghana," Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly, January 13, 2012, http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2012/01/13/january-13-2012-fantasy-coffins-in-ghana/10095/.

factor among all these tragic occurrences is the unengaged attitude of the church with local realities. A Christian path based on the authority of Scripture to lead people through the contextual maze is unavailable. These examples also call attention to the lack of guidance for such contextual participation from within the Reformed, and evangelical churches. In fact, for some, cultural participation by a Christian is a compromise of one's faith. Furthermore, underlying it all, there seems to be the problem that traditional churches which originated from Western mission and influence have never consciously engaged their non-Western multi-religious contexts and have thereby caused a socio-historical gap.[50]

The absence of any biblically sound, theologically reliable and pastorally astute input for the Indian believers in these common cultural family and community crises will only widen the gap between the church and its local context and run the risk of rendering the church irrelevant. According to Johnson, it is 'intellectual dishonesty' for the church to overlook or refuse to engage with these hermeneutically complex situations.[51] It is the hypothesis of this research that, notwithstanding this neglect, Reformed Theology has the ability to address contextual issues in India, without losing sight of its articulation of the authority of Scripture.

1.2 Theological Approaches to Contextual Challenges

In the preceding section I have suggested that traditional churches offer little to no guidance for a biblically faithful interaction of their members with contextual challenges such as participation in burial rites. I now proceed with a short survey of some representative theological approaches to cultural challenges and contextualization. This will make clear the extent to which both addressing contextual concerns and commitment to the authority of Scripture have been maintained simultaneously within Indian theology. First, I will look to theology from Evangelical and Reformed backgrounds and secondly, I will deal with more liberal voices.

1.2.1 Evangelical[52] and Reformed Approaches to Theology

Indian Reformed and evangelical theology have developed as a straightforward continuation of Western Reformed and evangelical theology. This

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[50] Hwa Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas?: The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology*, second edition (UK: Regnum Books International, 2014), Accommodation to Chinese culture: Matteo Ricci, eBook format.

[51] Luke Timothy Johnson, "The Bible's Authority for and in the Church," in *Engaging Biblical Authority: Perspective on the Bible as Scripture*, ed. William P. Brown (Louisville. London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), Kinds of Authority, eBook format.

[52] Evangelicals, in general, may be defined as those who accept the Christian Scriptures as divinely inspired, and with final authority in matters of faith and religious practice. Liberals, in general, are those who do not view Scripture as the divinely inspired word of God but as an expression of human religious experience. Further, Scripture is not considered as the final authority in matters related to religious life and theological development. For example, Laji Chacko proposes, "Christological formulation should occur from the living experience of the community whereby the community can encounter Christ within their own experience…" Laji Chacko, *Introduction to Christian Theologies in India* (Kolkata, WB: Sceptre, 2014), 10.

means that it shares in Western Reformed and evangelical theology's main traits. One of these traits is that Reformed theology has been formed in interaction with the specific challenges of the Western world in general, and of the developing European nation-states in particular. Reformed confessions formulate Christian doctrine but not without displaying this specific contextuality. Among other things, this becomes evident from the selection of themes that were and were not dealt with in the Reformed confessions. It is also reflected in the emphasis given to several doctrines in them. For example, the Reformed confession 'The Westminster Confession of Faith' was a response to the Catholic king James II and the Arminian Archbishop William Laud.[53] Its context was not the Asian religious plurality, evangelism and missions, nor the work of the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of Scripture that was developed in deliberate opposition to Rome also displays the original context in which it was written.[54]

The development of Reformed theology in the later stages displays the same tendency. For example, the continued unfolding of the doctrine of Scripture was meant as a response to the challenges of the Enlightenment and historical-critical readings of the Bible. The Church had to make its way through philosophical and intellectual revolutions, where the authority or warrant of establishing the truth was scientifically analysed. Modern approaches were used to acquire scientific knowledge for scientific advancement. Against that background, the doctrine of Scripture in particular, received a foundational, almost axiomatic, position. Similarly, other doctrines like church life and Christian life, while displaying anti-modernist content, were developed with approaches that fitted this modern context.[55] Evangelicals and Reformed Christians emphasized the divine inspiration and infallibility of the Bible, the latter tending to conceive of it as inerrancy. Some strands of Reformed theology, especially Dutch Neo-Calvinism, adopted a stance that was not simply defensive but also entered into questions that were raised by the modernistic attention to the Bible's human authors and historicity. However, their theological creativity still retained the Western context of modernity. They all fiercely emphasized the Bible as the chief, supreme and ultimate authority. For some it even became the foundation for all knowledge.[56] Indicative of their approach was the 1978 "Chicago Statement" on the inerrancy of Scripture, signed by 268 evangelical Christians, including Reformed Christians.

Since then some non-Western Reformed and evangelical churches have mitigated their view on Scripture without really surrendering their traditional convictions. Hwa Yung observes that the understanding of Asia Theological Association (ATA) regarding the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture is similar

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[53] Justin S. Holcomb, *Know the Creed and Councils* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 131.

[54] John H. Leith, *Assembly at Westminster: Reformed Theology in the Making* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2008) For example, it shows how the post-Reformation context affected the Westminster Confession.

[55] John D. Woodbridge and Frank A. James III, *Church History, Volume Two: From Pre-Reformation to the Present Day: The Rise and Growth of the Church in Its Cultural, Intellectual, and Political Context*, ePub edition, 2017, vol. Two (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), Contemporary American Evangelicalism, eBook format.

[56] Matthew. M Barrett, *God's Word Alone---The Authority of Scripture: What the Reformers Taught...and Why It Still Matters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), What is sola Scriptura, eBook format.

to Western evangelicalism.[57] However, even such mitigations occurred under the pressure of cultural, scientific and philosophical influences that are very much marked by the modern and postmodern Western context.

During these Post–Reformation developments, this contextual character of Reformed theology, including the Reformed doctrine of Scripture was overlooked. Doctrines and theological convictions were treated as timeless revealed truths. These were to be preserved as a kind of reservoir to draw from, and build on rational thought in order to address all matters of thought and life.[58] These traits have led to specific emphases in the interaction between Scripture and context. The dominant paradigm became that of applying a given, allegedly unchangeable truth to ever changing circumstances. For some that could even be done without consciously engaging such contexts.[59] Others, however, proved to be aware of the need to understand the various contexts. Dan Doriani argues that a person needs to understand the culture of the world so that the truth from Scripture can be applied.[60] But even then the context plays no role in discovering the meaning of Scripture and truth. This meaning is already given and ascertained before we engage context. Frame states, "The meaning of Scripture is its application."[61] On a similar note, Doriani argues, "The theology is "the application of the Word of God by persons to all areas of life" to promote godliness and spiritual health."[62] This implies at least two things. First, the context itself is secondary to this revealed scriptural truth and will not really be able to influence the discovery of that truth. Second, no explicit distinction is made between Scripture and what has been formulated as Scriptural doctrine. Thus, the underlying but forgotten specific historical and Western contexts that gave shape to Reformed doctrine, its accents and formulation, secretly and unconsciously dominate given contexts. This means that western Reformed and evangelical theology unintendedly and unconsciously act as a hidden power-structure in non-Western contexts.[63]

Against this backdrop, as Western Reformed and evangelical theology entered the non-western context, it, almost intuitively, adopted an antithetical stance. Traditionally it had already rejected any religion which did not conform to the

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[57] Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas?*, Conservatives Asian Theologies After World War Two: ATA and Evangelical response. eBook format.

[58] Ad L. Th. de Bruijne, "Christian Ethics and God's Use of the Bible," in *Correctly Handling the Word of Truth: Reformed Hermeneutics Today*, ed. Mees te Velde and Gerhard H. Visscher (Wipf & Stock, 2014), Introduction, eBook format.Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience*, eBook format (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, Regnum Africa, 2004), Chapter 3, Christian affirmation, eBook format.

[59] Steve Hu, "The Importance of Postcolonial Conversation," in *Evangelical Postcolonial Conversations: Global Awakenings in Theology and Praxis*, ed. Kay Higuera Smith, Jayachitra Lalitha, and L. Daniel Hawk (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Press, 2014), eBook format.

[60] Daniel M. Doriani, "Take, Read," in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. D. A. Carson, ePub (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), Understanding of the world deepens our reading, eBook format.

[61] John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Pub., 1987), 67,97. in Doriani, "Take, Read," Reading that promotes Life-Lectio Divina, eBook Format.

[62] Doriani, "Take, Read," Reading that promotes life-Lectio Divinia, eBook format.

[63] Robert S. Heaney, "Prospects and Problems for Evangelical Postcolonialisms," in *Evangelical Postcolonial Conversations: Global Awakenings in Theology and Praxis*, ed. Kay Higuera Smith, Jayachitra Lalitha, and L. Daniel Hawk (Illinois: IVP, 2014), evangelicalism (s), eBook format.

Reformed faith, a conviction very much alive in the present time. For example, Poythress invokes Cornelius Van Til's indubitable antithetical view against other religions. He argues, "Cornelius Van Til was right in teaching that there is an antithesis in principle between the thinking of Christians and non-Christians, covenant keepers and covenant breakers."[64] Similarly, while developing the ten tenets of Covenantal apologetics, Oliphint formulated the seventh tenet as, "There is an absolute, covenantal antithesis between Christian theism and any other opposing position. Thus, Christianity is true and anything opposing it is false."[65] Remaining unaware of its own conflation of Biblical faith and Western cultural traits, Reformed and evangelical theology tended to expand this antithetical vision of other religions to the more cultural dimensions of such religions. As the Reformed and evangelical churches expanded their missionary activities into the non-western world, their missionaries carried western culture, theology and theological methods with them. With these they refuted and replaced many cultural traits connected to indigenous religions. They addressed the urgent needs of the people, making great advances in medical, educational, and social reform. For example, Reformed and Presbyterian faith was brought to India by the mission agencies sent by Reformed Churches from the west. In 1812, six missionaries were sent by ABCFM (The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission) to India. This was followed by Scottish Presbyterian missionaries in 1823, American Presbyterians missionaries in 1833, Irish Presbyterian in1841, Welsh Presbyterians in 1841, Associate Reformed Presbyterians in 1855, and Canadian Presbyterians in 1876.[66] Matthew Ebenezer emphasizes the urgent social, health, educational and evangelisation needs these Reformed missionaries encountered in India, and they worked hard to meet these urgent needs.[67] However, their approach shows that in matters related to the theological development in India, the missionaries in India did not interact with India's social, religious and cultural landscape (contextualization). The missionaries limited themselves to faithfully replicating and applying theological truths previously formulated in the west.[68]

John Joshua Raja observes that Western missionaries in general (including missionaries from Reformed churches) had a militant approach towards other

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[64] Vern S. Poythress et al., "Biblical Hermeneutics," in *Seeing Christ in All of Scripture: Hermeneutics at Westminster Theological Seminary*, ed. Peter A. Lillback, Kindle edition (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster Seminary Press, 2016), Presuppositions for Hermeneutics, eBook format.

[65] K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles and Practice in Defense of Our Faith*, 1 edition (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2013), The ten tenets, eBook format.

[66] Matthew Ebenezer, "Bringing the Reformed Faith to India" (International Conference of Reformed Churches, Jordon, Ontario, Canada, July 13, 2017), 5–11.

[67] Ebenezer, 11.

[68] Matthew Ebenezer, "American Presbyterian and Islam in India 1855-1923: A Critical Evaluation of the Contribution of Isidor Loewenthal (1826-1864) & Elwood Morris Wherry (1843-1927)" (Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation, Philadelphia, USA, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1998), 37. Martien E. Brinkman, *The Non-Western Jesus: Jesus as Bodhisattva, Avatara, Guru, Prophet, Ancestor or Healer?*, trans. Henry and Lucy Jansen (London, New York: Routledge, 2014), 243. Matthew Ebenezer, "Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Dehradun, India: The Past, Present, and Future, the Story in a Nutshell," June 19, 2019, http://wrfnet.org/articles/2019/06/presbyterian-theological-seminary-dehradun-india-retrospective#.X9CSna2B2t8.

religions and their cultural practices. He strongly argues that the exclusive claims of Christianity against other religions were made with imperialistic agendas: to defend institutional Christianity, to protect the power structure of the church, and to hold on to denominational doctrine and the culture of the west.[69] Thus, Christianity in India has been identified with colonial imperialism.[70] Even when we are aware of Raja's non-Reformed starting-point, we cannot escape the truth of his analysis. It concurs with my suspicion that Reformed theology acts as a power structure, resulting from blindness to its own Western contextuality. Although the Reformed Churches responded to contextual needs such as social and economic development, health, education and evangelism, the need for theologizing within the Indian context was never felt. Furthermore, the church was reluctant to integrate the cultural, religious and national identity of the local context in any theological development in India. Factors such as a lack of knowledge of other religions, lack of sensitivity towards socio-cultural issues and customs, lack of consideration for certain religious traditions, and a lack of humility built a barrier between Christian missionaries and Indian society.[71]

Some western missionaries/theologians such as Bruce Nicholls, Paul Hiebert, and Timothy Tennent affirm this. Hiebert observes that in the Protestant mission era from 1800-1950, there was no response to contextual challenges, and hence calls this a period of 'non-contextualization'.[72] The reason behind this attitude was the strong belief of the missionaries that there was nothing worthwhile in the culture of other religions. Therefore, it was believed that every cultural aspect of other religious traditions had to be obliterated before building up Christianity.[73] A similar observation comes from Nicholls, a missionary to India. He observes that some missionaries were focussed on upholding the purity of the gospel and theological formation to the extent that they were insensitive to the people's cultural thought patterns and behaviour.[74] Tennent describes the evangelical approach to other religions succinctly. Whereas the liberals accept "all sacred texts on the same shelf as equal partners," the conservative Christians call the Quran "a satanic book," and describe the Hindu Scriptures as "full of evil, spiritual darkness and deception."[75] Bong Rin Ro observes that Reformed churches in Asia have been strictly following western dominated theological methods,[76] with minimum engagement with contextual realities in their theological formation. Mohan Chacko, a Reformed scholar from India, also admits that Reformed theology in India overlooked contextual challenges and

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[69] John Joshua Raja, *Doing Theology in a Pluralistic Context* (NCC Review, 2005), 188.

[70] Bruce J. Nicholls, *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture* (USA: IVP, 1979), 28.

[71] J. Paul Pennington, *Christian Barriers to Jesus Conversations and Questions from the Indian Context* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2017), 11,22,23.

[72] Paul Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 11, no. 3 (July): 104.

[73] Hiebert, 104.

[74] Nicholls, *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture*, 8.

[75] Timothy C. Tennent, "Can Hindu Scriptures Serve as a 'Tutor' to Christ?," in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. D. A. Carson, ePub (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), Two lessons from Asian Christians, eBook format.

[76] Bong Rin Ro, "The Bible and Theology in Asian Context," in *Contextualization: Asian Theology*, ed. Bong Rin Ro and Ruth Eshenaur (Bangalore: Asia Theological Association and the Association of Evangelical Theological Education in India, 1988), 68-74.

avoided any interaction between contextual realities and Scripture. Hence, the role of an Indian theologian or pastor was restricted to faithfully applying the timeless truths to their changing contexts, and reproducing the theology of the western theological traditions as given to them.[77]

This lack of contextual awareness in Reformed theology has widened the gap between the church and a multi-religious Indian society. Evangelical and Reformed churches have been seen as propagators of a colonial religion, a hidden-power structure controlled by the western Church and their theology. Due to this approach, even today, Christianity in India is described as a western religion. Consequently, there are many Christians who have stopped attending or becoming members of the church. In fact, they consider themselves Churchless Christians. Some attend church, but do not consider being baptized or becoming members of the church. These 'churchless Christians' are discreet about their identity; hence, they call themselves 'anonymous' Christians, and *Bhaktas*.[78]

Gradually, a few evangelical theologians in India, such as S. Sumithra, Ken Gnanakan, and S. Athyal began responding to Indian realities, albeit in a limited manner.[79] Their late response seems to have come from being under pressure for not matching up with the ecumenical scholars who were interacting with contextual realities. This was true especially with regards to religious pluralism. According to Moreau's research, even on a global scale there are few evangelical scholars who have written sufficiently on contextualization.[80] Moreau found six evangelical theologians who have articulated a clear position of contextualization. These theologians identified by Moreau are Hesselgrave, Bevans, Schreiter, Gilliland, Van Engen and Nicholls. Of these, only Nicholls, a New Zealander, is connected to India. His model was a bi-polar approach: dogmatic versus existential. Nicholls, while addressing the religious pluralistic context in India, seems to be against the use of images, symbols, metaphors, and parables because these contextual elements are congenial to experiential-based hermeneutics.[81] He argues for a hermeneutical model, which ought to be dogmatic in nature. It follows creeds and confessions, a believing community, and is based on the theological writings of the Reformers.[82] Similarly, Ken Gnanakan proposes several propositions for a theology of religions. His proposal includes creation, sin, the sinful nature, general revelation as preparatory revelation, leading of the

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[77] Mohan Chacko, *The Challenge of Doing Theology in India*, International Theological Congress (Kampen: Theologische Universiteit, 1994), 2.

[78] For details of Christian barriers, refer to Pennington, *Christian Barriers to Jesus Conversations and Questions from the Indian Context*.

[79] Ken Gnanakan, "Some Insight Into Indian Christian Theology," in *Global Theology in Evangelical Perspective: Exploring the Contextual Nature of Theology and Mission*, ed. Jeffrey P. Greenman and Gene L. Green (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2012), Rethinking Christianity, eBook format.

[80] A. Scott Moreau, "Evangelical Models of Contextualization," in *Local Theology for the Global Church: Principles for an Evangelical Approach to Contextualization*, ed. Matthew Cook et al. (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2010).

[81] Bruce J. Nicholls, "Hermeneutics, Theology, and Culture with Special Reference to Hindu Culture," in *The Bible and Theology in Asian Context: An Evangelical Perspective on Asian Theology*, ed. Bong Rin Ro and Ruth Eshenaur (Bangalore: Asia Theological Association and the Association of Evangelical Theological Education in India, 1988), 252–53.

[82] Nicholls, 254.

Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ as the final revelation.[83] However, their approaches remain Western oriented and little focus is given to any real engagement with other religious traditions and non-western cultural values to genuinely develop a Reformed and evangelical theology.

Mohan Chacko, who is an Indian and a Reformed theologian, has deliberately engaged with the contextual challenge. He has written *An Asian Catechism*, which specifically includes questions about honouring parents and ancestors.[84] This catechism adheres to the classical Reformed faith, and follows the creeds and confessions. At the same time, it is sensitive to, and mindful of local contextual issues.[85] For example, in question number 127 he asks, "How shall we honour our family members or ancestors?"

> Answer: We honour our family members or ancestors
> by recognising the work of God's grace in their lives,
> seeking to imitate their good example,
> listening to their counsel,
> and by showing respect to them
> in culturally appropriate ways.
> But we must refrain from worshipping them or their spirits
> Through offerings or ceremonies.[86]

Although Chacko does not explicitly address questions related to burial/cremation, which is the pivotal contextual issue of this research, he does propose a way which may include participation in burial/cremation practices. This aforementioned question from the Asian Catechism can be applied to a person who wants to honour and respect parents or ancestors when confronted with the reality of burial or cremation customs. Chacko seems to offer room for a culturally relevant and appropriate way of acting in such circumstances, on the condition that worshipping the parents or their spirits through religious ceremonies will be avoided. This way of acting could combine genuine contextuality with respect for biblical authority. However, in India, most cultural practices are interwoven with religious ideologies, as are the cultural practices to honour parents. Detaching these two, that is, cultural practices and religious ideology, will be difficult and require more sophisticated theological reflection. Though pointing in a helpful direction, Chacko's sole question in the catechism has not provided this needed reflection. Elsewhere, Chacko has emphasized the importance of hermeneutics in addressing contextual issues. This is not just in order to apply pre-given truths, but begins the process of the discovery of truth itself. He also underscores the need to guard the parameters of such theological discovery within Christological and Scriptural criteria. Chacko emphasizes the urgency of developing a Reformed hermeneutics in India, which will uphold the

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[83] Gnanakan, "Some Insight Into Indian Christian Theology," Some Propositions for a theology of religions, eBook format.

[84] It should be noted that honouring parents and ancestors, and burial is a focal contextual issue dealt within this research.

[85] Mohan Chacko, *I Want to Know God: An Asian Catechism*, Second Edition (Dehradun: Truth and Grace, 2003).

[86] Chacko, 32.

authority of Scripture and yet address the urgent issues of our existence. He argues,

> …Theological truths must be relevant to the context. Moreover, this relevance factor does not come into the picture after the discovery of the truth, but in the very process of that discovery. This discovery process that we call "hermeneutics" or "interpretation" itself is not neutral. …Truths that are not relevant are not useful, no matter how true. In this sense also, theology is context-specific. Here is a question of priority also. Not all theological truths are equally relevant in every given situation. Detachment from the context makes theology irrelevant. Theology then becomes answers to questions no one is asking while serious questions go unanswered. (This is similar to freely distributing pills for losing weight in a famine-affected region.) …However, it may be necessary for us to reaffirm our conviction that there can be no Christian theology – Asian or any other – without the criterion of Jesus Christ, revealed in the Bible. One need not exclude the context from the process of theologising so long as this criterion is employed.[87]

I conclude that the challenge for Reformed theology in India is not just to replicate Western versions of Reformed theology but develop its own contextual variant. The latter should remain faithful to the authority of Scripture and at the same time interact with the reality of religious pluralism, power-structure and the accompanying cultural traits.

1.2.2   Liberal Approaches to Theology

Like Reformed and evangelical theologians, liberal theologians too, address contextual concerns by employing Scripture. Their contextual concerns range from doctrinal issues such as inspiration or inerrancy of Scripture to ethical issues like homosexuality and abortion, to social issues like poverty, and to religious issues such as plurality. However, in this process, unlike evangelicals, the authority of Scripture was diluted with the use of the other religious texts, spiritual experiences, and reasons.

Bong Rin Ro succinctly describes how Asian scholars, both evangelicals and liberals, have used the Bible in interaction with their context. He categorizes the approaches in four different methods. The first category is the syncretistic method. This form considers the reading of the Bible together with national religions (i.e., Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam) in order to intermix religious beliefs with the political and religious situation. Klaus Klostermaier and M.M. Thomas are representatives of this approach. The second category is the accommodation method. This method chooses prevailing customs and practices from the Bible and accommodates them with good ideas from other religions. An example of this approach is given by Matteo Ricci who chose the word "*Tien Chu*" (heavenly Lord) for God, which was a popular Chinese concept of God. Third is the situational method. Kazoh Kitamori, a Japanese theologian who described the pain of people, exemplifies this in the theology of the Pain of God. The fourth is a

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[87] Mohan Chacko, "Asian Christian Theology: An Introduction," Report on "Asian Theology" for the teachers of Presbyterian Theological Seminary (Dehradun: Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 2010) An Interesting anecdote about this report is that Dr. Chacko had to give reasons to the teachers of Presbyterian Theological Seminary stating why we teach Asian contextual theology in a Reformed Seminary. This illustrates the nervousness of a Reformed institution in the face of efforts made to address contextual challenges. .

biblically oriented Asian theology, which is meant to replace the dominance of theological education in Asia by western theological thought and western missionaries.[88]

Theologians from India, particularly, can be seen as having a threefold goal in mind in their attempt to address contextual realities in their theologising. First, Indian theologians, who were from a Hindu background, wanted to convince Hindu thinkers that the Christian faith is not totally alien, but is actually close to their cultures. Hence, they gave prominence to local religious culture over the authority of the Bible. Second, being oriented to Sanskrit literature and the classical Hindu tradition, they found that certain Hindu concepts can serve as tools for interpreting traditional theological motifs for Indian Christianity. Third, and more recently, the emphasis has shifted from mainstream Hindu-Sanskrit contextual theology to various subaltern contexts such as Dalit, tribal, feminist, and postcolonial theology. This shift from religious to social emphasis was due to the protest by subaltern groups because the focus of Indian theologians was mainly on high caste Hindu religious traditions. Hence, the realization of human dignity, liberation from oppressive power structures, and making Indian society based on justice and peace with the help of God became a focal point.[89]

How liberal theologians deal with the uniqueness and the authority of the Bible may be illustrated by a few examples. The first example is the use of the Bible amidst religious pluralism. India is a land of diversity. The heterogeneity is most evident in the plurality of religious creeds and convictions, as well as their sacred texts. On top of this there is a diversity in caste, color, culture, cuisine, consonant, costume and custom. Various religions, such as Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, and Primal religions exist in India. As a result, A. J. Appasamy argues for the use of religious traditions available as a significant criterion for theology.[90] They made a deeper study into the Hindu religious concept of *Avatara* for Jesus's incarnation. Moreover, liberal theologians follow a dialogical approach with other religions and are sensitive to the feelings of other religions. This is done at the expense of treating the Bible as equal with other sacred texts. For example, George Soares-Prabhu argues for an appropriate way to read the Bible narratives in Asia in matrix with other Asian sacred texts. He exemplifies this by a comparative reading of the great commission of Jesus Christ in Matthew 28: 16-20 with a similar great command of Buddha to his disciples in Mahavagga 1.10-11.1.[91] Stanley Samartha emphasizes religious harmony while compromising the authority of the Christian Scripture. He vehemently argues for the equality of all sacred Scriptures, claiming that ignoring this plurality of scriptures will amount to blindness and self-deception. He further argues that each sacred text has to be considered equally

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[88] Ro, "The Bible and Theology in Asian Context," 68–74.

[89] Ramesh Chand, "A Critical Study of Lesslie Newbigin's Soteriology and Its Implication for the Indian Church" (Bangalore, India, Unpublished M.Th Thesis, SAIACS, 2005), 2.

[90] Chacko, *Introduction to Christian Theologies in India*, 92.

[91] George M Soares-Prabhu, "Two Mission Commands: An Interpretation of Matthew 28:16-20 in the Light of a Buddhist Text," in *Voices From the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah, New Edition (Maryknoll, NY/London: Orbis Books/SPCK, 1995), 319–38.

authoritative.[92] The establishment of indigenous churches was not combined with maintaining the absolute authority of Scripture in faith and theology.[93] Liberals also questioned God's exclusive self-revelation in Jesus Christ, and stripped away Scripture's claim to be the decisive divine revelation to humanity. Paul Gregorios, in a consultation on 'Hermeneutics in an Indian context' concludes his presentation by emphasizing,

> In a discussion of hermeneutics in India today, we cannot take the authority of the Christian scripture as self-evidently valid and reject other scriptures (Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Jain, Sikh, etc.) as totally invalid. … Any fruitful Indian discussion of hermeneutics must take into account the fact that scripture cannot be interpreted apart from tradition. The idea that there is some 'objective' and 'universal' meaning of the New Testament should be seriously questioned. ...[94]

Another Indian theologian, Upadhyaya identified parallels between Hindu *shastras* and the Old Testament to show that just as God used the Old Testament to prepare Judaism for Christ, so God has used the Hindu *shastras* to prepare Hindus for Christ. Moreover, Brahmabandhav Uphadhaya searched for true Christianity through Hindu Vedic culture.[95] On the whole, liberal theology equates the Bible with other religious scriptures and questions its primary authority over other scriptures.

The second example is the use of the Bible in cremation and burial rituals in a Hindu-Christian context. Samartha, a priest in the Church of South India, and an ecumenical theologian, proposes to give equal space to all religious texts during the funerary rituals amidst a multi-religious context. He narrates a specific situation in India where the deceased had both a Hindu and Christian relationship. Samartha organized a funeral ceremony keeping Hindu and Christian sentiments in consideration. He read from Hindu and Christian sacred scriptures, used images from both religions and prayers and songs from both traditions. In doing this both Hindus and Christians would go home comforted in spite of the death of their dear one. The intention behind this method was not to divide these religious groups, but unite them. This approach to funerary participation was done regarding all religious texts and practices as equal, valid and authoritative. Just as the Christian Scriptures are a source of nourishment, comfort and peace so are all the other sacred scriptures.[96] Samartha vociferously campaigned against the sole authority of Scripture, and maintained that the Bible cannot be understood without a parallel study of the co-existing religious texts. He says that it will be egregious to

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[92] Stanley J. Samartha, "Scripture and Scriptures," in *Voices from the Margins: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (Orbis Books/SPCK, 1995), 30.

[93] Joshua Raja, *Doing Theology in a Pluralistic Context*, 188.

[94] Paul Gregorios, "Hermeneutics in India Today in the Light of World Debate," *The Indian Journal of Theology*, no. 28 (1997): 14.

[95] Bruce Nicholls, *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture* (Illinois/Exeter: Inter Varsity Press/Paternoster Press, 1979), 34. K.P. Aleaz, "The Theological Writings of Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya Re-Examined," accessed October 23, 2017, https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ijt/28-2_055.pdf.

[96] Stanley J. Samartha, "Church in the World: A Hindu-Christian Funeral," Theology Today, accessed August 30, 2012, http://ttj.sagepub.com/content/44/4/480.full.pdf+html.

overlook the fact that other religious texts have been nourishing the people of Asia for thousands of years.[97]

Therefore, when confronted with the challenge to develop a genuine contextual theology that at the same time remains faithful to the authority of Scripture Reformed theology cannot just consult its liberal counterparts. Where Reformed and evangelical theology, though upholding the authority of Scripture, lack contextual sensitivity, liberal theology suffers from the opposite weakness. It proves that liberal theology was able to display contextuality only at the cost of surrendering Scriptural authority.

1.3 Choosing the theological field for the research

The challenge to develop a contextual Reformed theology for India can be addressed from the perspective of more than one theological discipline. This research has chosen the angle of theological hermeneutics developed by the American theologian Kevin Vanhoozer. It is considered organic, canonical, catholic and contextual. Vanhoozer's hermeneutical method claims to guide rather than charting out a particular method to follow.[98] This dissertation will test and analyse these claims in search of a Reformed contextual hermeneutics for India. However, before we proceed with that analysis, I first present a short impression of the possible contributions that several theological disciplines could make, and have made. I have limited my exemplary selection to contextual theology, systematic theology, the theology of religions and hermeneutics, without analysing these contributions.

1.3.1 Contextual Theology

The relatively new section of theology that goes under the label 'contextual theology' could provide an appropriate tradition of thought to address the contextual challenge for Reformed theology in India. This theological discipline has developed since the 1970's and has produced several methods and a distinct vocabulary. Terms and concepts like adaptation, indigenization, translation, critical contextualization, inculturation, situational theology, liberation theology inhabit its deliberations.

Various definitions of contextualization have been formulated, often differing from each other depending on the purpose of contextualization. However, most definitions show a tendency to concentrate only on the communication of the gospel and proclamation instead of rightly explaining the meaning of the gospel. For instance, Nicholls propagates a type of contextualization which is practiced only in a verbal form, so that the message of the gospel remains safe and unaltered. He defines contextualization as, "the

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[97] Stanley J. Samartha, *The Search for New Hermeneutics in Asian Christian Theology* (Bangalore/Madras: BTE/CLS, 1987), 2.

[98] Moreau, "Evangelical Models of Contextualization," organic models and methods, eBook format.

translation of the unchanging content of the Gospel of the kingdom into verbal form meaningful to the peoples in their separate cultures…"[99] Hesselgrave seems to give a similar definition where the focus is on communication, albeit relevant to a local context. He defines,

> Christian contextualization can be thought of as the attempt to communicate the message of the person, works, Word, and will of God in a way that is faithful to God's revelation, especially as it is put forth in the teachings of Holy Scripture, and that is meaningful to respondents in their respective cultural and existential contexts.[100]

Several efforts have also been posited to systematically categorize different methods of contextualization.[101] Moreau has done thorough research on the evangelical models of contextualization. He categorizes the various models under six schemes of contextualization based on their proponents or their classification. These scholars and their models are Nicholls: dogmatic, Hesselgrave: apostolic accommodation, Bevans: translation, Schrieter: Adaption and translation, Gilliland: adaptation, translation and critical realism, and Van Engen: indigenization.[102]

Along with the categorization of the models of contextualization, there were attempts to set up theological commissions. These commissions explored how to engage with contextual issues in theological formation. Among them are the birth of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) in 1976 and the Association of Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA) in 1957. Both were influential in development towards a contextual theology. The interest whetted by the development of contextual theology would focus attention on a major challenge in theological formation: How can the church appropriately and effectively interpret the gospel amidst diverse contextual challenges.

Moreau elucidates that most evangelicals focus on evangelism while contextualizing; hence their methods are mostly limited to preaching, church planting and discipleship. Further, he observes that although most evangelicals claim to base their methods of contextualization on the authority of Scripture, this is not always the case. What is often lacking in most approaches to contextualization is a concrete ecclesial inclination, a chief driving force, and a consistency with church confessions. He notes,

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[99] Bruce J. Nicholls, "Theological Education and Evangelization," in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: International Congress on World Evangelization Lausanne, Switzerland*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis, Minn.: World Wide Publications, 1975), 647, http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jacksonwu/2013/05/24/how-do-evangelicasl-define-contextualization/.

[100] David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013), 200, http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jacksonwu/2013/05/24/how-do-evangelicasl-define-contextualization/.

[101] Three prominent works among them are Robert J. Schreiter *Constructing Local Theologies,* Stephen J. Bevans *Models of Contextual Theology,* and John Travis 'C1 to C6 Spectrum' of contextualization.

[102] For further details refer to, Moreau, "Evangelical Models of Contextualization," Models of maps and models, eBook format.

[Evangelical models of contextualization] are largely in agreement on the normative role of Scripture played in contextualization, … [However], there was no clear indication among the models that denominational or doctrinal orientation was a consistent or even a primary factor in driving the development or advocacy of particular approaches.[103]

1.3.2   Systematic Theology: The Doctrine of Scripture

Another theological discipline from which the challenge to develop a contextual and yet Reformed theology could be addressed is systematic theology.

Systematic theology itself, to a large extent, can be seen as a contextual discipline. Silva rightly depicts Systematic theology as an 'exercise in contextualization' where attempts were made to bridge the hermeneutical gap between the Bible and the western Church.[104] He also points out how Hodge innovatively combined classical Reformed theology and some components of nineteenth century philosophy in his systematic theology.[105] Similarly, Van den Toren states that the definition of contextualization suggests that systematic theology is the cultural expression and understanding of the Christian faith from the perspective of the west.[106] In fact, significant theological issues systematically address contextual needs, such as belief in God, the glory of God, man's salvation, doctrines of Christ, faith, life, worship and church polity.

It should also be noticed that theological issues have been developed and elaborated within specific contexts. The debates with the Roman Catholic Church during the Reformation, and the 19th century interaction with enlightenment philosophers and liberal theologians are examples of this. Here, the Reformed answer consisted in 'retrieving and applying' sola Scriptura.[107] *Sola Scriptura* signifies Scriptural authority as the "… final say-so as concerns all matters of truth and right, faith and practice, thought and life."[108] Van den Toren puts it succinctly,

Because Christ is God's supreme revelation that happened once and for all and because these texts are the only trustworthy witnesses to his life, these Scriptures are canonical: they have authority for all subsequent generations whose understanding of Jesus should always be judged in the light of the words of these first witnesses.[109]

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[103] Moreau, A schema of evangelical models of contextualization, eBook format.

[104] Moisés Silva and Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, ePub Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), Theology and exegesis, eBook format.

[105] Silva and Kaiser Jr., Theology and exegesis, eBook format.

[106] Benno van den Toren, "Can We See the Naked Theological Truth?," in *Local Theology for the Global Church: Principles for an Evangelical Approach to Contextualization*, ed. Matthew Cook et al. (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2010), One supra-cultural core? eBook format.

[107] Barrett, *God's Word Alone---The Authority of Scripture*, Moving forward, eBook format.

[108] Kevin J Vanhoozer, "May We Go Beyond What Is Written After All? The Pattern of Theological Authority and the Problem of Doctrinal Development," in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), The protestant, Puritan, and Philippian Principles, eBook format.

[109] Toren, "Can We See the Naked Theological Truth?," The canon, eBook format.

With regard to scriptural authority amid the challenges from Roman Catholicism, the Westminster Confession of Faith 1.6 states "The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture…" In service of developing scriptural authority, several theological concepts were developed. These include inspiration, revelation, unity of the Bible, infallibility, sufficiency of Scripture and canonization. The Westminster Confession of faith serves as an example of a canonical and yet contextual theology.

Engaging with systematic theology in general and the doctrine of Scripture in particular can provide a point of entrance to address contextual concerns. This is a positive answer exemplified by Poythress. He connects Scripture, systematic theology and hermeneutics in a circular movement as criteria for theological development. This gives the authority of Scripture the place of prominence. Poythress argues,

> The circle begins with the Bible. We use the Bible to derive hermeneutical principles. Then we use hermeneutics to interpret the Bible. And so our interpretation of the Bible depends on itself! How can we be sure that we have it right? To make the process more complicated, we can add a third stage to the circle, namely, systematic theology. We use the Bible as our source for systematic theology, which is supposed to be a summary of what the Bible teaches. Then we use systematic theology as a presupposition for hermeneutics. And then hermeneutics guides how we interpret the Bible. In this process, we never leave behind our initial use of the Bible, which might be flawed."[110]

1.3.3 Theology of Religions

A third theological field from where we can engage the challenge of contextuality is the Theology of Religions. This discipline attempts to account theologically for the existence and meaning of non-Christian religions, with their rituals and sacred texts. Since the challenge in the Indian context is directly connected to the evaluation of non-Christian religions and their accompanying cultural phenomena, a theology of religions could be expected to offer a fruitful route to meet that challenge.

A vigorous theological debate, pertaining to the place of other religions is taking place worldwide. Although, the 'theology of religions' as a theological discipline has advanced only since the 1960's,[111] the question of the attitude of God's people to other religions has been a dominant theme from the time of the Old Testament. The Theology of religions emerged as the dominant field of study in 1962 in Catholic theological circles and then spread to the Protestant arena.[112] Evangelicals, who were initially reluctant to consider the study of other religions

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[110] Poythress et al., "Biblical Hermeneutics," Hermeneutical circularity? eBook format.

[111] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20th Anniversary edition (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2011), Mission as witness to people of other living faiths. eBook format.

[112] Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical & Contemporary Perspectives* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2003) Christian Theology of Religions as a Theological Discipline, eBook format.

in theology, are now also compelled to reconsider, discuss and understand their theological approach with other religions. As a result, several statements on the approach and relationship of the church with other religions have been made by international evangelical conferences. A few significant ones were: the Frankfurt Declaration (1970), the Lausanne Covenant (1974) and the Manila Manifesto (1992).[113]

In the last decade the approaches of the church towards other religions can be classified in a quintessential taxonomy of theology of religions. These are exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism, with their respective goals of conversion, completion and conversation. A modified version of this taxonomy distinguishes Ecclesiocentrism (Salvation only in Christ, available in the church), Christocentrism (Salvation only in Christ, but its benefits are beyond the boundaries of church), and Theocentrism (All religions point to the same God/god).[114]

The Exclusivism position has traditionally been a prevalent view among many evangelicals. This is where conversion, conquest or displacement has been the prevailing approach with other religions. However, the exclusivist claims of Christianity to be the superior religion came under pressure from two major factors, first the Enlightenment and then the two World Wars. The first factor, the Enlightenment pushed forward 'reason' or scientific knowledge/facts as the criteria for survival, instead of religious values. The second factor - the World Wars - demonstrated the moral, spiritual and ethical bankruptcy of the Christian West. These factors questioned the traditional attitude to other religions. To a greater or lesser extent an openness developed to learn from the traditions of other faiths. Christianity came to be seen as a completion of other religions, an inclusivism position. The pluralist position employed Copernicus' astronomical model to argue that God is at the centre and all the religions revolve, in the way of planets, around God. This means, all religions, including Christianity are considered true, salvific, and authentic ways to reach God. Several metaphors were employed to propound this model. According to some, all religions are like different colours in the rainbow which originate from the same source. Others compare all religions with many rivers heading towards the same destination, or many paths leading to the peak of the mountain. However, the evangelical theologian Gordon Smith argues that the taxonomy and the categories for a theology of religions have to be questioned. This is because the farcical and superficial polarity between exclusivism and inclusivism limits our reading of Scripture and affects our attitude towards other religions.[115]

1.3.4 Hermeneutics

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[113] For a detailed discussion on these statements, refer to Kärkkäinen, The response of the Evangelical Movement, eBook format.

[114] Kärkkäinen, In search of a paradigm, eBook format.

[115] Gordon T. Smith, "Religions and the Bible: An Agenda for Evangelicals," in *Christianity and The Religions: A Biblical Theology of World Religions*, ed. Edward Rommen and Harold A. Netland, Evangelical Missiological Society Series, Number 2 (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1995), 16.

The fourth theological discipline to address the contextual challenge for Reformed theology is hermeneutics. In hermeneutics not only the study of the text and context of the author is of paramount interest, but also its interplay with the contextual issues of the reader. Hermeneutics is a complex term to define. Hermeneutics was initially meant as the reflection on the methods of the exegesis of Scripture. This was a fruit of the Protestant Reformation, provoking renewed attention to the exegesis of Scripture. Complexity mounted from the 19th century onward when in addition to the biblical/ theological disciplines, several disciplines including philosophical, literary, social, and communicational, were incorporated into Hermeneutics.[116] The meaning and focus of the hermeneutics of Scripture has been shifting. This is due to significant changes in the science of interpretation, to discernment and to the situatedness of a reader. These approaches to interpretation of Scripture were taken with the aim to bridge the gap between the author of the text and the reader. As a result, various interpretative approaches developed. Cornelis P. Venema categorizes different approaches to the interpretation of Scripture as pre-critical, critical and post-critical.[117] Porter categorizes them according to the location of meaning discovered: behind the text, within the text and in front of the text.[118] Thiselton describes the work of hermeneutics as the discipline which "… explores how to read, understand, and handle texts, especially those written in another time or in a context of life different from our own. Biblical hermeneutics investigates more specifically how to read, understand, apply and respond to biblical texts."[119] He further classifies the different hermeneutic trends in the past as romantic, phenomenological and existential, philosophical, critical, structural, and post structural.[120]

Regardless of the different phases in hermeneutics, it seems that the primary intention of biblical interpretation has now become to bridge the chronological, geographical, cultural, linguistic, literary, and supernatural gap between the text and the reader.[121] Using different approaches, theologians have strived to locate the meaning of Scripture and communicate it within their context. While doing so, some have maintained traditional convictions, considering Scripture as the indubitable authority, a divine-human book, and norming norm for theological thought. They often employed the historical-grammatical method of interpretation (pre-critical biblical interpretation). Others employed scientific and historical-critical methods to locate the meaning of the text as to its own historical context, thus rejecting Scripture as a unified, divine and canonical book that directly speaks in today's contexts (Historical-critical biblical interpretation). There have been efforts to combine these two hermeneutical approaches to the

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[116] Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2009), Toward a definition of hermeneutics, eBook format.

[117] Cornelis P. Venema, "Interpreting the Bible in and with the Church: An Evaluation of 'Post-Liberal' or 'Post-Critical' Hermeneutics," in *Correctly Handling the Word of Truth: Reformed Hermeneutics Today*, ed. Mees te Velde and Gerhard H. Visscher (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2014), eBook format.

[118] Stanley E. Porter Jr and Beth M. Stovell, eds., *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2012), A brief history of the development of biblical hermeneutics, eBook format.

[119] Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, Towards a definition of Hermeneutics, eBook format.

[120] Thiselton, What is hermeneutics? eBook format.

[121] Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 1st edition (Colorado Springs, Co: David C. Cook, 1991), 16–18.

reading of Scripture: the pre-critical and critical approach. Yet for others, the context of the present reader became the priority over the author's intended meaning (Reader-oriented ideological biblical interpretation).

Persistent attention given to contextuality and to contextual differences illustrates why hermeneutics also provides a possible point of entrance to address the contextual challenge for Reformed theology in India. Although all four of these theological disciplines seem like a viable route for contextual theology, Vanhoozer's theological hermeneutics seems to incorporate all four of them. His attempt is to create route for the formation of theology which is both canonical and yet contextually sensitive.

1.3.5   Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology employed for this research

As stated, this research will proceed from the angle of theological hermeneutics, thus largely leaving aside the alternative possible routes. I have two reasons for that decision. In the first place, for the aim of the research most of these alternatives appear to have a relatively narrower scope than hermeneutics. Contextual theology, while certainly dealing with the challenges of this research is connected to a very specific body of literature, in which the evangelical participants mainly concentrate on the missionary challenge. The doctrine of scripture for example, being of utmost importance for the challenge that Reformed theology faces in India, is only on the periphery. A theology of religions, while addressing core elements of the challenge, does not directly cover the doctrine of Scripture nor some of the non-religious contextual aspects. Systematic theology, while being directly concerned with the doctrine of Scripture, is not so much involved with contextual analysis as appears to be required by the problem at hand. Hermeneutics touches upon the doctrine of Scripture as much as upon the context of the readers. Hermeneutics can more naturally and easily include the relevant concerns of the other disciplines more than any of the other approaches do. Biblical hermeneutics as a theological discipline "… investigates more specifically how to read, understand, apply and respond to biblical texts," [122] argues Thiselton. As such**,** theological hermeneutics as a discipline incorporates the authority of Scripture, and interplay of the context of both the Bible and the reader's context in its investigation.

The second reason for concentrating on hermeneutics is that this research has selected the hermeneutics of the American Reformed theologian Kevin Vanhoozer. Vanhoozer's theological hermeneutics claims to provide the point of departure for meeting the challenge of developing a theological approach that is equally true to the Reformed doctrine of Scripture and to the requirements of the Indian context.

Moreover, Vanhoozer's hermeneutics confirms the aforementioned wider scope of hermeneutics. Bowald commends Vanhoozer's hermeneutics for faithfully maintaining the authority of Scripture. He acknowledges that Vanhoozer rightfully appropriates God, the text and the context of the reader in his biblical

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[122] Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, Toward a definition of hermeneutics, eBook format.

hermeneutics.[123] Vanhoozer's oeuvre itself indicates that he not only engages explicitly with hermeneutical theology but also with theological fields such as contextual theology, the doctrine of Scripture, and the theology of religions. Each of these have employed contextuality as a theological criterion. In relation to hermeneutics and contextual theology, Moreau points out that Vanhoozer's organic trajectory gives freedom for pastors to creatively perform in contextualizing the gospel. He further notes that Vanhoozer's model of contextualization has a strong emphasis on Scripture and Church doctrine as driving forces for contextualization. He calls Vanhoozer's model a theodramatic orientation which "views the gospel as essentially dramatic, the Bible as a script, doctrine as theatrical direction, and the church as part of the ongoing performance of salvation."[124] Similarly, Ramachandra points out that theological metaphors like redemption as theodrama, improvisation of theodrama, the Bible as a script proposed by Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology, are relevant approaches towards contextualization amidst a postcolonial context.[125] Chan finds Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology proposed in *The Drama of Doctrine* easy to understand because it corresponds between Scripture and the ecclesial community, where the Holy Spirit operates the relationship.[126] Likewise, Porter observes that Vanhoozer approaches hermeneutics as a systematic theologian, is within the ecclesial community. While doing so, he addresses contextual challenges of foundationalism and conservatism, and at the same time upholds the canon as the basis of belief.[127] In relation to the authority of Scripture in hermeneutical theology, which is one of the main interests of this research, Vanhoozer confirms this by proposing to locate it within the triune economy of God's communication action: "The ultimate authority for Christian theology is the triune God speaking-acting in the Scriptures."[128] Therefore, there are sufficient reasons for the expectation that hermeneutical interaction with Kevin Vanhoozer will prove fruitful.

1.4 Method and research questions

1.4.1   Hypothesis: Vanhoozer's hermeneutics

[123] Mark Alan Bowald, *Rendering the Word in Theological Hermeneutics: Mapping Divine and Human Agency* (England, USA: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 72,73 eBook format.

[124] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 190.in Moreau, "Evangelical Models of Contextualization," Organic models and methods, eBook format.

[125] Vinoth Ramachandra, *Subverting Global Myths: Theology and the Public Issues Shaping Our World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2008), postcolonialism and resistance from the margins, eBook format.

[126] Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from the Ground Up* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2014), 13.

[127] Stanley E. Porter, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction to Interpretive Theory* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011), Theological hermeneutics, eBook format.

[128] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 67.

In search of a hermeneutic that is faithful to a Reformed doctrine of Scripture and at the same time capable of addressing Indian contextual challenges, I have chosen a specific method. The hypothesis is that Vanhoozer's theological hermeneutic will provide a satisfying answer to this search. I start with the preliminary expectation that his thought has the potential to be such a hermeneutics or else be elaborated into it. During the course of the research this hypothesis will be tested.

The reasons for selecting Vanhoozer's theology are twofold. On both poles of the problem field, the Reformed doctrine of Scripture and contextual potential, his theology appears to be promising.

With respect to the identity of his theology Vanhoozer aspires to develop a creative retrieval of Reformed theology while interacting with the context of modernity and postmodernity. He has affirmed that his hermeneutics is based on the Reformed theology of Scripture. In an interview Vanhoozer mentions that Reformed theology governs his works.[129] Similarly, in *Is There Meaning in the Text*, Vanhoozer claims to argue for "author-oriented interpretation through a creative retrieval of Reformed theology and speech-act philosophy."[130] Moreover, there are several inherently Reformed themes in Vanhoozer's hermeneutics. A few specific examples are a Christocentric focus,[131] Sola Scriptura (canon principle),[132] covenant (material principle), Trinitarian emphasis in theodrama,[133] sovereignty of God, sovereign grace, and Augustinian hermeneutics.[134] On another note, Vanhoozer expresses his desire to base his work on Reformed giants like John Calvin in building bridges to relate canon to concept.[135] Also, in the introduction to *The Drama of Doctrine*, Vanhoozer made a passing remark that he belongs to a Presbyterian church. Moreau too, observes that Vanhoozer's theology of contextualization has been written from a confessional or ecclesial perspective. Further, while responding to an interview by Eric J. Johnson, who inquired about

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[129] Vanhoozer has explicitly mentioned in an interview that his book Remythologizing Theology is built upon Reformed emphasis on divine sovereignty. Guy Davies, "Exiled Preacher: Remythologizing Theology: An Interview with Kevin Vanhoozer," accessed March 9, 2010, http://exiledpreacher.blogspot.nl/2010/03/remythologizing-theology-interview-with.html.

[130] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*, Anniversary edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 10.

[131] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Ascending the Mountain, Singing the Rock: Biblical Interpretation Earthed, Typed, and Transfigured," in *Heaven on Earth: Theological Interpretation in Ecumenical Dialogue*, ed. Hans Boersma, 1 edition (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

[132] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Scripture and Tradition," in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 149–69., Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*.

[133] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture & Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, Ill. : Leicester, England: IVP Academic, 2002)., Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*,Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*.

[134] Vanhoozer's Theological hermeneutics is inherently built upon Augustinian hermeneutics, however, for specific reference refer to Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 29–32.

[135] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "From Canon to Concept: 'Same' and 'Other' in the Relation Between Biblical and Systematic Theology," April 13, 1994, 96, http://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/sbet/12-2_096.pdf., 96.

Vanhoozer's theological and church identity, Vanhoozer replied that he considers himself to be from Reformed catholic evangelical church.[136]

Vanhoozer is accused by some for pushing a Reformed confessional framework in his approach to theology. Yet others consider him to be too ecumenical and not genuinely Reformed in a classical way.[137] Notwithstanding the polarity of these critiques, we can expect at least enough deliberate affinity to the Reformed doctrine of Scripture to make it fruitful to engage his hermeneutics.

With respect to the contextual character of Vanhoozer's hermeneutics something comparable can be stated. In the first place, Vanhoozer's hermeneutics are deliberately contextual in itself, as he engages with contextual challenges from pre-modernity, modernity and postmodernity. He aspires to answer the hermeneutical questions posed by modernity and postmodernity.[138] Secondly, Vanhoozer is also consciously engaging theological debates among non-western theologians who are involved in developing theology for their local situations. Subjects like religious pluralism and postcolonialism are specifically addressed. Vanhoozer names three specific contextual hermeneutical necessities to respect when considering these challenges. The first necessity is to recognize an interpreters' situatedness in history. The second is the practical necessity to transform unjust social structures, and the third necessity is to rediscover one's own cultural identity.[139]

We can conclude that Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology explicitly relates local and contextual concerns to the authority of Scripture. He argues, "Viewing theology as theodrama enables us to address simultaneously the questions of biblical hermeneutics and cultural identity, for the dramatic model calls for speech and actions that are faithful to Scripture yet fitting to specific contexts."[140] This conclusion justifies a preliminary choice for Vanhoozer's hermeneutics to serve as a starting point and hypothesis for this research.

1.4.2   Criteria: Testing the hypothesis

The anticipated hypothesis for investigation is that Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theory contributes toward a theological approach which is contextually relevant to the Indian context. At the same time, it remains faithful to the Reformed conviction concerning the authority of Scripture.

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[136] Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Eric. L. Johnson, "Interview with Kevin J. Vanhoozer: What Does It Mean to Be Biblical? What Should Biblical Authority Look Like in the 21st Century?," *Edification: The Transdisciplinary Journal of Christian Psychology* 4, no. 1 (2010): 76.

[137] Andreas Köstenberger, "Vanhoozer Response to My Review | Biblical Foundations," accessed February 26, 2015, http://www.biblicalfoundations.org/vanhoozer-responds-to-my-review/.

[138] Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al., "Imprisoned or Free? Text, Status, and Theological Interpretation in the Master/Slave Discourse of Philemon," in *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), Theological Hermeneutics: from divine discourse to Theodrama, eBook format.

[139] Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All," 97.

[140] Vanhoozer, 110.

In accordance with that starting point, this research will present and analyse Vanhoozer's hermeneutics as well as test it in order to confirm or falsify its proposed strengths. An attempt will be made to correct its possible flaws and to further develop its possible incentives. This test will mainly remain on the level of theory but with an open eye to the practical dilemmas with which this study started. Such a methodical trajectory is in accord with established methods of scientific research. These include a concept of 'theoretical fruitfulness', referring to a theory's potential to do justice to as many aspects of a problem field as possible.[141] This can be tested by comparing the theory to other approaches and by checking its practical consequences.

Accordingly, Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theory will be tested by confronting it with both Kwame Bediako's and R. Sugirtharajah's theory of hermeneutics which are developed within multi-religious and postcolonial contexts, respectively. Finally, Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology will be tested by considering its practical consequences in the arena of burial in a multi-religious context.

The first dialogue partner is Manasseh Kwame Dakwa Bediako (July 7, 1945-June 10, 2008). Bediako was an ordained Presbyterian minister who interacted with Reformed theological themes, Reformed scholars in the west and African Traditional Religions. He then developed a hermeneutics for 'Africanization of the Christian faith'. Therefore, his thoughts can be expected to be useful in order to test Vanhoozer's potential to meet the challenges of a Reformed theology amidst a non-western religious pluralism. Bediako used the models of Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria to argue that just as they used the Greco-Roman cultural categories of their time to contextualize the Gospel and create a Christian identity, so should African Christians use their own cultural heritage in forming their Christian identity.[142]

The second dialogue partner is R. S. Sugirtharajah. Sugirtharajah is a Sri Lankan postcolonial theologian who has vehemently spoken against the power structures of the Western church and their monopoly over theological development worldwide. In fact, he describes in detail how the western church, in his view, used the authority of Scripture as colonial apparatus. Consequently, he proposes a vernacular hermeneutics from a postcolonial perspective. In a vernacular hermeneutics, Sugirtharajah argues for a hermeneutics which not only discovers our relationship to people of other faiths, but also shows how to interpret Scripture while considering the presence of other scriptural texts, and the spiritual intuitions offered by other religions.[143] This hermeneutical proposal

[141] Kars Veling, *Methodologie En de Grondslagen van Een Pluriforme Sociologie* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1982), 100,119,122,139ff; Ad L. Th. de Bruijne, *Levend in Leviatan: Een Onderzoek Naar de Theorie over "christendom" in de Politieke Theologie van Oliver O'Donovan* (Kampen: Kok, 2006), 29f; Nancey Murphy, "John Howard Yoder's Systematic Defense of Christian Pacifism," in *The Wisdom of the Cross, Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas et al. (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1999), 45–68.

[142] Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992).

[143] R. S. Sugirtharajah, "Inter-Faith Hermeneutics: An Example and Some Implications.," *Mission Studies* 7, no. 1 (1990): 9.

claims to allow Christians to uphold their belief in Christ as their special communicator of God, but without forcing Christ to be necessarily normative for others.[144] Though certainly not displaying affinities with the Reformed tradition, Sugirtharajah nevertheless can contribute to testing the contextual potential of Vanhoozer's hermeneutics. Not only will his Asian background bring the Indian context more specifically into view, but even more helpful will be his critical sensitivity concerning the hidden power structures of Western theologies. This will be important in finding out whether developing Vanhoozer's Reformed hermeneutics can escape the risk of colonial dominance over Indian contextual reality.

As far as the practical dimensions of the test are concerned, the theme of burial amidst religious plurality has been selected in line with the practical experiences with which this research began. This part of testing Vanhoozer's theory will not so much occur by drawing on empirical data but rather by applying the conversation between Vanhoozer, Bediako and Sugirtharajah to this particular situation.

The research anticipates relevant implications for Reformed Christianity in India for a number of reasons. First, the fact that there is interplay between three continents, implying three geographical locations and cultural situations: North America: Vanhoozer- Africa: Bediako- Asia: Sugirtharajah. Of these, two are non-Western while one is Western. Second, a dialogue will take place between two very different Christian traditions: Reformed Presbyterian and liberal-postcolonial. The third factor is that the dialogue partners have experienced and addressed the practical dimensions of burial either personally or indirectly. The fourth factor is that the interplay between dialogue partners will be within three specific social contexts, namely, for Vanhoozer: a (more or less) Christian society, for Bediako: a multi-religious society, and for Sugirtharajah: a multi-religious and Postcolonial context.

My argument thus far implies two criteria for testing the theoretical and practical fruitfulness and potential of Vanhoozer's hermeneutics within the Indian context. In order to stand the test his theories have to adequately fit the tradition of the Reformed doctrine of Scripture. They must also be able to guide Christians to sufficiently interact with a multi-religious context and with the challenge of the western hidden power-structures in non-western contexts, especially in India.

i. Adequately following a Reformed doctrine of Scripture

The fact that Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology will be tested with this criterion implies an underlying conviction from which this study operates and which will not be contested. This conviction is that the Reformed doctrine of Scripture is genuine, profound and trustworthy. Moreover, a profound and trustworthy interpretation of Scripture in hermeneutics is the essence of any Reformed doctrine and theology.

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[144] R. Sugirtharajah, "Jesus I Know, Paul I Know, but Who Is God? Christology and Multi-Faith Hermeneutics," *The Modern Churchman* 29, no. 4 (January 1, 1987): 30, https://doi.org/10.3828/MC.29.4.28.

Further, the research will test Vanhoozer's claim of employing Reformed theology within the researcher's specific Reformed ecclesial tradition in India, namely the Reformed Presbyterian Church of India (RPCI). Since there is enormous diversity within the Reformed tradition, a comprehensive study to include all strands of Reformed tradition would be a daunting task. It should be noted that there is a wide range of diversity within the Reformed tradition based on social, political, cultural, confessional, hermeneutical, ecclesiological, historical, and ethical perspectives. There are also differences in affiliations.[145] McGowan argues that it is better to see the diverse strands of Reformed faith and theology united as a school of thought, instead of as different strands of thought.[146] Therefore, Reformed theological tradition which the researcher adheres to, and in which the research will be investigated and limited to, is the Classical Reformed tradition as practiced within the RPCI. The origin of the RPCI can be tracked to the mission work of the Presbyterian Church in North India starting from the 1830s. In 1969, the Reformed Presbyterian Church and Bible Presbyterian Church merged. Hence, the RPCI has been continuing their heritage of church doctrine and polity.[147] The core conviction of RPCI is,

> The written Word of God consisting of the sixty-six books of the Holy Scripture is the final and infallible authority for all the doctrine, government and life of this Church. RPCI affirms the Westminster Standards (the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms) as its subordinate standard, a subject to the Scriptures and conveying a faithful interpretation of them.[148]

My choice for the sub tradition of the RPCI is made because of practical methodical reasons and in no way condescends other strands of Reformed theology

ii. Sufficient interaction with multi-religious context and power-structures

The second criteria will be to analyse how Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology sufficiently interacts with multi-religiosity and the context of power structure. Multi-religiosity and power-structure are considered to be two prominent contextual realities in Asia, and specifically in India. These are posing challenges to hermeneutical undertakings. The first challenge is the plurality of religions. The presence and spiritual influence of various religions and their sacred texts in India pose an immeasurable challenge to the traditional exclusive superiority of Christian theology. Hence, for a Christian theology to be relevant and sensitive in India, it has to interact with the place, meaning and the value of other religions. In a dialogue with Bediako, it will be evaluated how Vanhoozer deals with religious pluralism while maintaining the authority of Scripture. This test will also include practical dimension of the

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[145] Dirkie Smit, "Trends and Direction in Reformed Theology," *The Expository Times* 7, no. 122 (2011): 313.

[146] Samuel T. Logan and A. T. B McGowan, eds., "Crafting an Evangelical, Reformed and Missional Theology for the Twenty-First Century," in *Reformed Means Missional: Following Jesus into the World* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2013), 241.

[147] "Form of Government: The Reformed Presbyterian Church of India," Revised 2010, 12.

[148] "Form of Government: The Reformed Presbyterian Church of India," 12.

multi-religious context such as participation in burial ceremonies. The second challenge is the existence of hidden western power-structures in Christian interactions with non-western contexts. The dominant power-structure of the west in hermeneutical endeavours in India uncovers Christian theology as being a western enterprise, and Christianity as a western religion. In a dialogue with Sugirtharajah, it will be investigated as to how Vanhoozer's hermeneutics is able to do justice to this risk while maintaining the authority of Scripture. This test will also comprise practical dimension of participation in burial ceremonies.

After analysing and testing Vanhoozer's hermeneutics through an interaction with Bediako and Sugirtharajah, the research will draw improved, relevant and executable recommendations. These recommendations will strive to guide Indian churches in how to deal with burial practices in a Reformed manner in a context of multi-religiosity and power structures.

1.5 Research question, sub-questions, and the outline of the research

The preceding considerations result in the following research question and the outline of this study: In what ways can Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theory contribute towards a theology which is contextually relevant to the Indian context, while faithfully upholding the Reformed vision on the authority of Scripture?

This main research question will guide the sub-questions for the subsequent chapters. The research question guiding the second chapter is: In what way does Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theory address hermeneutical and contextual challenges and to what extent does he succeed in continuing the tradition of a Reformed view on Scripture?

The research question guiding the third chapter will be: To what extent does an interaction with Bediako's African hermeneutics confirm, contradict or improve Vanhoozer's hermeneutical model, especially with respect to its potential to interact with a multi-religious context?

The fourth chapter will examine: to what extent does an interaction with Sugirtharajah's postcolonial Asian hermeneutics confirm, contradict or improve Vanhoozer's hermeneutical model, especially with respect to its potential sensitivity to the role of power-structures in the Indian context?

The research will culminate with the fifth chapter which will ask the following question: How does an analysis of Vanhoozer's hermeneutics, refined by engagement with the hermeneutics of both Bediako and Sugirtharajah, result in a satisfying expansion of the Reformed doctrine of Scripture, and a hermeneutical theology that is relevant to the Indian context, especially in relation to burial practices in this multi-religious context?

CHAPTER TWO

VANHOOZER'S HERMENEUTICAL THEORY, ITS RESPONSE TO HERMENEUTICAL AND CONTEXTUAL CHALLENGES, AND FURTHER EXPANDING OF A REFORMED VIEW OF SCRIPTURE

2.1 Introduction

A theologian is a "missionary-explorer."[149] This is an apt prototype, which Kevin J. Vanhoozer borrows from David Livingston's missionary sojourn. It is an apt prototype because it describes a theologian who weaves his/her way through interpreting the Bible challenged by modernity and postmodernity. Vanhoozer, an American Reformed evangelical theorist, is one of the missionary-explorers who deftly directs his way through responding to theological challenges posed both by modernity and postmodernity.[150]

In a postmodern theological scenario, the focus of theology has shifted from canon to context; from an author centred meaning of the text to a community and location centred meaning of Scripture. This new hermeneutical priority has given rise to the formation of contextual theologies, both in the southern and northern hemispheres. Vanhoozer considers some of the western postmodern theologies to be bedfellows with many non-western theologies (usually referred to as contextual theologies) as they each question the content and method of western traditional theology.[151] A few Indian theologians have also jumped onto the postmodern hermeneutical bandwagon.[152] The postmodern theological approaches question the theological approach of western traditions. Particularly the authority and the sufficiency of the Bible in answering contextual concerns, such as, the credibility of diverse religions and their sacred scriptures, poverty, justice, nationalism and subaltern issues. This hermeneutical development has challenged both the western traditional churches and their denominational/confessional counterparts in non-western churches. One among such traditional and confessional theological approaches is the Reformed Presbyterian Church of India (RPCI) which will be the ecclesial background of this research and specifically chapter two. RPCI, which strictly follows classical Reformed theology, is currently grappling with

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[149] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Exploring the World, Following the Word : The Credibility of Evangelical Theology In an Incredulous Age," *Trinity Journal* 16, no. 1 (March 1, 1995): 3, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0000897207&site=ehost-live.

[150] Hans Boersma, "On Baking Pumpkin Pie: Kevin Vanhoozer and Yves Congar on Tradition," *Calvin Theological Journal* 42, no. 2 (November 1, 2007): 237.

[151] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 89.

[152] For a brief sketch of Indian theological method, refer to Ken Gnanakan, "Some Insight Into Indian Christian Theology," in *Global Theology in Evangelical Perspective: Exploring the Contextual Nature of Theology and Mission*, ed. Jeffrey P. Greenman and Gene L. Green (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2012), 116–35.

various contextual concerns in India and their place in theological development.[153] An everyday challenge for them is: in what ways can Reformed theology uphold the primacy of the Bible while being contextually relevant in the multi-religious context of India? Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology claims to provide an appropriate hermeneutical proposal which is developed on the "creative retrieval of Reformed theology,"[154] and built-in interaction with the challenges posed by the postmodern theological agenda. In fact, Vanhoozer claims that his hermeneutical approach focuses on a 'Theo-dramatic' approach which takes into account both the canon and the context. More pointedly, a theo-dramatic approach to theology claims to be " …faithful to Scripture yet fitting to specific context."[155]

Therefore, the purpose and the research question of this chapter is to investigate, "In what way Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theory addresses hermeneutical and contextual challenges and to what extent he succeeds in expanding the tradition of a Reformed view of Scripture." The research question of this chapter contributes to the main investigation of the research: In what ways could Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theory contribute towards a theology which is contextually relevant to the Indian context, while faithfully upholding the Reformed authority of Scripture?

Accordingly, the second chapter is divided into six parts. The first and second sections will briefly place Vanhoozer in the current hermeneutical debate through his seminal works. The third section will describe Vanhoozer's Theological Hermeneutics, contextual challenges, and the use of metaphors in theological hermeneutics. The fourth section will study the authority of Scripture expanding on the Reformed view of Scripture. The fifth section will describe how Vanhoozer implements a reframed authority of Scripture in his hermeneutical theology. The last section will culminate with a critical evaluation and conclusion.

It should be emphasized that the main theological arguments of this chapter will be based on Vanhoozer's theological hermeneutics which is skilfully propounded in *The Drama of Doctrine.*[156] The emphasis will be on the authority of the Scriptures while addressing contextual concerns. The research will only deal with theological issues related to the "Theological Interpretation of the Scripture" (TIS, an umbrella hermeneutical method), or various philosophical allies of Vanhoozer's theological hermeneutics such as the Speech Act theory and Authorial Discourse, insofar as they are relevant for the purpose of this chapter.

2.2. Kevin J. Vanhoozer: A Brief Introduction

Kevin Jon Vanhoozer (born March 10, 1957) is an American theologian and current Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical

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[153] Mohan Chacko, *The Challenge of Doing Theology in India*, International Theological Congress (Kampen: Theologische Universiteit, 1994).

[154] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*, Anniversary edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 10.

[155] Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All," 110, 114.

[156] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

Divinity School (TEDS) in Deerfield, Illinois. Vanhoozer's academic interest focuses on systematic theology, hermeneutics, and postmodernism.

Vanhoozer is one of the significant theological luminaries committed to Evangelical theology, focusing on the authority of the Bible and appropriating it in any given context. Vanhoozer's hermeneutical proposal is a theological bricolage. It integrates diverse western philosophies: Roman Catholic, Protestant, Eastern Orthodox theologies, hermeneutical dialogue with theologians from the northern and southern hemispheres, after a thoughtful and truthful dialogue with evangelical faith. Although his work aims at evangelical theology at large, he is thoroughly conversant with classical Reformed theology. It is evident in his entire oeuvre that doctrine is not only perceived as science or theory, but as a practical direction for the fitting performance of an individual and the community in a given context. Take for instance what he says in *Is There a Meaning in this Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (1998). Vanhoozer defends the Bible against "incredulity towards meaning" by the postmodern critics. In response, he offers a Trinitarian hermeneutics, which emphasizes author-oriented meaning of the Scripture through a creative retrieval of Reformed theology and speech-act philosophy.[157] Similarly in *First Theology: God, Scripture & Hermeneutics* (2002), a collection of published essays, he also claims to propose a Trinitarian theological hermeneutics against postmodern critics.[158] This book considers questions related to God, Scripture and the interpretation of the Scriptures to be interlinked, affecting each other simultaneously in their formation.[159] Further, God is perceived as a communicative agent and Scripture as God's communicative action. Therefore, Scripture is read with the aim of discovering "What God is saying, and doing, in and through the Scripture."[160]

This theological and hermeneutical trajectory continues with the arrival of *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-linguistic Approach to Christian Theology,* 2005. This book was awarded the top honor in the theology/ethics category of the 2006 *Christianity Today* Book Awards. *The Drama of Doctrine* argues for the vitality of God's speech and action through a drama metaphor: the theo-dramatic approach in contrast to the cultural-linguistic approach to theology. The theo-dramatic approach in theology depicts a theologian as a dramaturge, Scripture as the script, theological understanding as performance, the church as the company, and the pastor as director.[161] As the title of the book suggests, it argues for a divine-human interactive theatre, anticipating participation from the reader in a grateful manner. In relation to Vanhoozer's oeuvre, this book is meant to be a significant advance in theology and hermeneutics that attempts to fully involve God, Scripture and the reader in the drama of hermeneutics. It should be noted that all the books and articles written by Vanhoozer after *The Drama of Doctrine* follow hermeneutical and theological trajectories based on this book. More pointedly, this book is committed to a theo-dramatic approach to theology which claims to be grounded in the Reformed theology of Scripture, directing both the

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[157] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 10.
[158] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture & Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, Ill. : Leicester, England: IVP Academic, 2002), 12–13.
[159] Vanhoozer, 10.
[160] Vanhoozer, 290.
[161] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, xii.

individual and the community to a fitting participation of theo-drama in their context.[162] More importantly, it gives scope to contextual theologians searching for a theology firmly rooted in Scripture, which at the same time stresses practicing the theo-drama.

Then came Vanhoozer's *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship*, (2010), propelling the theo-drama forward against modern science and the postmodern question of the existence of God and the credibility of a divine communicative agent.[163] This book answers a few prominent questions which are invariably asked by several contextual theologians. For example, theological inquiries related to the sovereignty of God and the problem of evil in the world, and God's love entailing divine suffering.

Vanhoozer's *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine* (2014), develops Vanhoozer's work on the performance of theo-drama, already articulated in the fourth part of *The Drama of Doctrine*, but with much more attention given to its practical significance.[164] This book not only suggests criteria for performing the theo-drama but also proposes measures to evaluate the performance. In addition to Scripture as the normative guide for performance, Vanhoozer also points to the hermeneutical role of tradition, which, too, has "faithfully wrestle[d]" in performing the Gospel.[165] This book was awarded the top honour in the theology/ethics category of the 2015 *Christianity Today* Book Awards.[166] A recent publication of Vanhoozer's *Biblical Authority After Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity* (2016) was also awarded the top honour in the theology/ethics category of the 2017 *Christianity Today* Book Awards.[167] *Biblical Authority After Babel* faithfully redeploys the five *Solas* of the Reformation and creatively renews and reforms biblical interpretation, theology and the church. The book seems to contribute towards a robust spirit of mere Protestantism.

Along with the several aforementioned seminal works, Vanhoozer has also edited, and contributed to several books which push forward the agenda of theo-drama and the enactment of the theo-drama in new situations. A brief sketch of Vanhoozer's oeuvre suggests Vanhoozer as a significant missionary- explorer, and a promising Reformed hermeneutist. He has been assisting the global church to move from Scripture to doctrine, and directing it to its fitting performance in their complex contemporary situations.

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[162] Vanhoozer, xii.

[163] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship*, Reprint edition (Cambridge University Press, 2012), abstract.

[164] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), xv.

[165] Vanhoozer, 200.

[166] Community Contributor Trinity International University, "Trinity's Vanhoozer Wins 2015 Christianity Today Book Award," chicagotribune.com, December 19, 2014, http://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/libertyville/community/chi-ugc-article-trinitys-vanhoozer-wins-2015-christianity-to-2014-12-19-story.html.

[167] Trinity Communications, "Vanhoozer Wins 2017 Christianity Today Theology/Ethics Book Award | Trinity Newsroom," December 16, 2016, https://news.tiu.edu/2016/12/16/vanhoozer-2017-ct-book-award/.

2.3 Vanhoozer's Theological Hermeneutics: Definition, Hermeneutical and Contextual Challenges, the Use of Drama Metaphor in Theology and its Relation to Theological Hermeneutics

2.3.1 Defining Vanhoozer's Hermeneutical Theory: Theological Hermeneutics

Before delving into Vanhoozer's theological hermeneutics, a brief remark is necessary about Theological Hermeneutics as a hermeneutical movement under the category of "Theological interpretation of Scripture" (TIS). Although TIS is an ancient hermeneutical theory based on the confession that God is the living, Triune God who communicates through the Holy Spirit and draws people into His kingdom through Jesus Christ,[168] it resurfaced in the latter part of the 20th century.[169] Plummer, however, observes that the agenda of theological hermeneutics could be traced to Barth and the Yale school. It surfaced again in the 90's with contemporary pioneers like Watson, Fowl and Vanhoozer.[170] Porter considers Anthony Thiselton and Kevin J. Vanhoozer as two leading proponents of Theological hermeneutics.[171] The difference between them, observes Porter, is that Thiselton grounds his arguments on exegesis, whereas Vanhoozer grounds his arguments on systematic theology.[172] Plummer points out that there are several names which are used interchangeably for theological hermeneutics, such as theological interpretation of Scripture, theological interpretation of the Bible, theological interpretation, theological hermeneutics, theological commentary on the Bible, and theological exegesis.[173] The proponents of TIS are diverse biblical scholars, theologians, missiologists, and pastors.[174] Moreover, they are from various denominations such as, liberal Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Evangelicals who take different approaches to Theological hermeneutics without imposing their theological and confessional grid onto the biblical text.[175] TIS focuses on various approaches within hermeneutics, such as: author, text and the reader of Scripture. As such, one approach within TIS, is focussed on the text as the primary theological witness, whereas Vanhoozer emphasises the divine

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[168] Angus Paddison, "The History and Reemergence of Theological Interpretation," in *A Manifesto for Theological Interpretation*, ed. Craig G Bartholomew and Heath A. Thomas, Ebook edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), Introduction: The Marks of the History and Reemergence of Theological Interpretation, Ebook format.

[169] Paddison, Preface, eBook format.

[170] Robert L Plummer, "What Is the 'Theological Interpretation of Scripture,'" in *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 40 Questions Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publication, 2010), 314, http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/files/2012/02/Plummer-TIS.pdf.

[171] Stanley E. Porter, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction to Interpretive Theory* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011), chapter one, Epub format.

[172] Porter, Chapter one, ePub format.

[173] Plummer, "What Is the 'Theological Interpretation of Scripture,'" 313.

[174] Paddison, "The History and Reemergence of Theological Interpretation," Preface, Ebook format.

[175] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Introduction: What Is Theological Interpretation of the Bible?," in *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament: A Book-by-Book Survey*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig Bartholomew, and Daniel Treier (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 15.

authorship of the text.[176] Yet another focus within TIS is on the believing community, i.e., the communion of saints, who receive and appropriate the Bible in their own contexts. It is argued that these three hermeneutical approaches within TIS complement each other.[177] In spite of diverse proponents and emphases, theological hermeneutics is unified in its focus on history and biblical interpretation and theology in hermeneutics.[178]

Another significant feature of TIS is that it neither promotes any particular ecclesiastical tradition nor forces a confessional framework of any church tradition upon the text. Instead, it proposes and argues for a pluralistic theological method or multiperspectival theological systems.[179] Influenced by a certain plurality of communicative actions in Scripture, and the Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin's plural unity and creative understanding, Vanhoozer argues for a complete discernment of an authorial discourse by reading Scripture through multiple ecclesial traditions, such as Lutheran, Episcopalian, and Greek Orthodox.[180] This approach does not give credibility to or elevate any particular theological system or systems, but instead the diverse theological systems work together, and are accessed within both the Scriptural principle restrictions, and the ecumenical agreement of the church. Scripture principle is where, "… various authorial voices in the Old and New Testaments, taken together in their canonical context, constitute the Word of God written."[181] And, the Ecumenical agreement of the church believes that, "… the Bible should be read as a unity and as narrative testimony to the identities and actions of God and of Jesus Christ."[182]

Next is the Theological hermeneutics of Vanhoozer. Before defining his Theological hermeneutics as a theory, it is worthwhile to note Vanhoozer's understanding of both theology and hermeneutics. For Vanhoozer, theology is the knowledge of God, which begins both with God and the Scriptures.[183] Hence, the aim of theology is, "… to minister understanding and educate desire and to do this

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[176] Refer to a commentary series, a dictionary, and journal of the Theological Interpretation of the Scripture for the list of several contributors and proponents of TIS. Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al., eds., *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament: A Book-by-Book Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008).Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Daniel Treier, and N. T. Wright, eds., *Theological Interpretation of the New Testament: A Book-by-Book Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008).Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al., eds., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, First edition (London/ Grand Rapids, MI: SPCK/Baker Book House Company, 2005).

[177] Vanhoozer, "Introduction: What Is Theological Interpretation of the Bible?," 23-24.

[178] Craig G Bartholomew, "Introduction: Chagall's Exodus and the Swart-Benjamin Reworking," in *"Behind" the Text: History and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig G Bartholomew et al., vol. 4, Scripture and Hermeneutics Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), A theological turn? Ebook format.

[179] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology," in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI/England/Vancouver: Baker Books/Inter-Varsity Press/Regent College publishing, 2000), 79.

[180] Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al., "Four Theological Faces of Biblical Interpretation," in *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006).

[181] Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology," 81.

[182] Vanhoozer, "Introduction: What Is Theological Interpretation of the Bible?," 16.

[183] Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 38.

with the aim of edifying the church."[184] Theology, therefore, is not just theological data that begins both with God and Scripture. Theology is developed to make the church wise for salvation so that we can live out that knowledge in everyday life.[185] For Vanhoozer, theology within the purview of hermeneutics means that God is the author of Scripture (Scripture as the Word of God); and the aim of theological interpretation is "living faithfully with others before God."[186] Then there is also hermeneutics. There has always been a tussle between the two different approaches to hermeneutics, between the techniques of interpretation (the modern interpretation) and the focus on the understanding of the interpreter (the postmodern interpretation). Vanhoozer calls the first a "normative approach," following an epistemological methodology, and the latter he calls a "descriptive approach," which follows a much more ontological methodology.[187] Vanhoozer develops his definition of hermeneutics by amalgamating both the normative and descriptive approaches. He does so by defining hermeneutics as "discerning the discourse— what someone says to someone about something— in the text as work," basing his definition on Gadamer and Ricoeur's understanding of hermeneutics, with a Calvinistic supplementation.[188] For Gadamer, hermeneutics is an art of understanding when in conversation about the text, whereas, for Ricoeur, it is a discourse, where understanding is grasping, "what someone says to someone about something."[189] Calvin, however, believed in "authorial discourse", where the meaning of the text is based on the author's speech-act.[190]After integrating Gadamer, Ricoeur, and Calvin, Vanhoozer describes hermeneutics ultimately as, "… discern[ing] what the author said and did with regard to a particular subject matter."[191] Hence, Theological hermeneutics "… is the process of discerning the discourse, human and divine, in the canonical work."[192] Discerning the discourse entails focusing on the Triune God and human beings in God's commutative action in history, as well as focusing on the gospel as the subject matter of Scripture. Furthermore, Vanhoozer pinpoints five theses of Theological hermeneutics.

1. The ultimate authority for Christian theology is the triune God in communicative action.
2. A text's "plain meaning" or "natural sense" is the result of a person's communicative action.

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[184] Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding*, 204.

[185] Vanhoozer, 204-205.

[186] Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 285.

[187] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Discourse on Matter: Hermeneutics and the 'Miracle' of Understanding," in *Hermeneutics at the Crossroads*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, James K. A. Smith, and Bruce Ellis Benson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 4.

[188] Vanhoozer, 19.

[189] Vanhoozer, 19.

[190] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Ascending the Mountain, Singing the Rock: Biblical Interpretation Earthed, Typed, and Transfigured," in *Heaven on Earth: Theological Interpretation in Ecumenical Dialogue*, ed. Hans Boersma, 1 edition (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), Epub format.Originally published in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ""Ascending the Mountain, Singing the Rock: Biblical Interpretation Earthed, Typed, and Transfigured"," *Modern Theology* 28, no. 4 (October 2012): 781–803, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0025.2012.01784.x.

[191] Vanhoozer, "Discourse on Matter: Hermeneutics and the 'Miracle' of Understanding," 19.

[192] Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al., "Imprisoned or Free? Text, Status, and Theological Interpretation in the Master/Slave Discourse of Philemon," in *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), chapter three, ePub format.

3. To call the Bible "Scripture" is to acknowledge a divine intention that does not contravene, but supervenes on, the communicative intentions of its human author.
4. The theological interpretation of Scripture requires us to give "thick descriptions" of the canonical acts in the Bible performed by both the human and the divine author.
5. The norm of theological interpretation (namely, what an author has intentionally said/done), generates an interpretive aim: to bear competent witness to what an author has said/done.[193]

2.3.2 Hermeneutical and Contextual challenges that prompted the Theological Hermeneutics of Vanhoozer

Having now defined the 'Theological hermeneutics' of Vanhoozer, this section will bring out hermeneutical and contextual challenges that instigated Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theory. The theological hermeneutics of Vanhoozer did not develop in isolation, but rather from the hermeneutical challenges coming from both modernity and postmodernity. This is evident in Vanhoozer's rationale for his work on hermeneutical theory.[194] Thus, as this section highlights the hermeneutical and contextual challenges posed by modernity and postmodernity, special attention will be given to the hermeneutical status of Scripture observed by Vanhoozer.

2.3.2.1 Hermeneutical and contextual challenges of Modernity

The Reformation and the Enlightenment had many similarities, yet also differed substantially from each other in a number of key areas. Both these similarities and differences had momentous hermeneutical outcomes. The Reformation was a rejection of the tradition and authority of the Roman Church over Scripture. The victory of the authority of Scripture over Church tradition (*Sola Scriptura)* gave an immense focus to the primacy of the Scripture in theology. So much so, that the Reformers regarded biblical texts as 'many deposits of propositional truth,' which were used not just as ecclesial canon, but became the matter of epistemology for other disciplines.[195]

The Enlightenment, a hermeneutical movement fathered by Descartes, "… was an attempt to bring critical rationality and scientific method to bear not only on the natural but on the social world in order to "master" reality."[196] The modern era was the era of discovery, rationality, and a period of metanarrative.[197] As such,

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[193] Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 291–93.

[194] Vanhoozer et al., "Imprisoned or Free? Text, Status, and Theological Interpretation in the Master/Slave Discourse of Philemon," Theological Hermeneutics: from divine discourse to Theodrama, Kindle edition.

[195] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Scripture and Tradition," in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 149–50.

[196] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Pilgrim's Digress: Christian Thinking on and about Post/Modern Way," in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: Six Views*, ed. Myron B. Penner (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005), kindle format.

[197] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Mapping Evangelical Theology in a Post-Modern World," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, no. 22/1 (January 1998): 7.

there were epistemological and methodological similarities and disputes between the hermeneutical method of the Reformation and that of the Enlightenment. For example, the Reformation argued for Scripture alone over the ecclesial authority, and modernity argued from Reason alone. As Vanhoozer points out, the difference was that the Reformers viewed the world through the authority of the Scripture and church tradition, whereas the Enlightenment thinkers relied on their own reasoning power and scientific method. The Reformers focussed on the illumination of the Holy Spirit, given to some as a special grace; while modernity focussed on the illumination of reason, something accessible to everyone.[198] However, to address the challenges posed by the Enlightenment's scientific method, evangelicals employed the scientific methods/tools of modernity to study the Scripture and defend their theological stand.[199] For example, Charles Hodge used the modern inductive science to prove the trustworthiness of the theological interpretation of Scripture, where the logical mind corresponded to biblical data.[200] To study the Bible, Enlightenment thinkers, too, employed their scientific methodology to study the biblical texts, as they would study any text or a book. The results, according to Hans Frei, were damaging.[201] The most devastating effect was that the Bible was rejected as authoritative. The Bible was under scientific scrutiny like any other book. The unity and the historicity of the Old and the New Testament were undermined. In all the scientific scrutiny and methods, the authority of the Bible was lost,[202] compromised and blurred. It is not surprising, says Vanhoozer, when various contextual theologians describe the modern fundamentalists' theology of God as a kind of theory of God.[203] Yet, while Bible scholars were still dealing with the hermeneutical challenges of the modernity's scientific method, a new era began. This new era was a time of distrust in anything which claimed to put forth an absolute or universal method or logic to derive the truth.[204] It was the arrival of Postmodernity, with its new hermeneutical challenges for interpretation.

2.3.2.2 Hermeneutical and contextual challenges of Postmodernity

Vanhoozer describes postmodernity as "incredulity towards metanarrative" and credulity towards community based, tribal narrative.[205] He perceives Postmodernity as a condition which is non-detrimental, not fixed or definite: a condition of disbelief. He states, postmodernity is a ""condition": a state of being or fitness (e.g., a heart condition); a set of circumstances that affects how one functions (e.g., working conditions); a requirement that must be fulfilled

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[198] Vanhoozer, "Scripture and Tradition," 150.

[199] Vanhoozer, "Mapping Evangelical Theology in a Post-Modern World," 10.

[200] Vanhoozer, 10, 11.

[201] Hans W Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974). in Vanhoozer, "Scripture and Tradition," 151.

[202] Vanhoozer, "Scripture and Tradition," 151–52.

[203] Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All," 87.

[204] Vanhoozer, "Mapping Evangelical Theology in a Post-Modern World," 9.

[205] Vanhoozer, 9.

in order to do something else (e.g., a condition of entry)."[206] If modernity practiced the right method (reason) to derive 'knowledge and truth,' postmodernity gave priority to the reader's condition: 'situatedness and interestedness.'[207] Although postmodernity was incredulous towards modernity's 'Reason' as a universal method, it continued with 'reason' but only as influenced by one's situatedness. If modernity was about the discovery of reason and universal method, postmodernity was about the discovery of situatedness and pluriformity. Vanhoozer thinks that postmodernity's situatedness produced a number of turns, or paradigm shifts, in direct opposition to the prior era. These turns are linguistic, narrative and practical. The impact of the undercurrents of these paradigm shifts in deriving the meaning of the biblical text was startling.

The first turn in postmodernism was a linguistic turn. Vanhoozer refers to Wittgenstein's observation that meaning was derived in modernity by referring to words as mental concepts. The shift which postmodernity brought forth was in the way that meaning was derived through human beings' use of language within their social context.[208] Reason was universally employed in modernity regardless of the situatedness, culture, and language of the human being. The focus on language in postmodernity, accordingly to Vanhoozer, was not that it was a neutral tool, it included "the system of differences – the pattern of distinction and connections – that a given vocabulary imposes on the flux of human experience."[209] Since languages are considered to be of social construction, their universal reliability was destabilized. For example, a socialist will define church differently than a theologian. They will both use different sets of categories, including language, to define the church.[210]

The second turn in postmodernism was to story/narrative. Vanhoozer observes that Postmodernity was suspicious of a universal true story (metanarrative) which forms true identity, and instead focussed on the various human stories, despite still being suspicious of their truthfulness and continuity.[211] Why narrative? Vanhoozer refers to Hauerwas and Jones, who argue for "narrative, like language, as the medium in which humans live and move and have their being."[212] Vanhoozer adds that narrative is a form of language (referring to Ricoeur) which shapes and shows the identity of both an individual and the community within their historical situation.[213] Narrative is one of the genres for identifying Jesus Christ and the Triune God. The impact of the postmodern understanding of narrative was suspicion towards the truthfulness of the story of

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[206] Vanhoozer, "Pilgrim's Digress: Christian Thinking on and about Post/Modern Way," Stipulating: "Conditions of impossibility" Kindle format.

[207] Vanhoozer, "Scripture and Tradition," 152.

[208] Vanhoozer, "Pilgrim's Digress: Christian Thinking on and about Post/Modern Way," Kindle format.

[209] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Theology and the Condition of Postmodernity: A Report on Knowledge (of God)," in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 11.

[210] Vanhoozer, 12.

[211] Vanhoozer, 11.

[212] S. Hauerwas, and L.G. Jones, eds. Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989) in Vanhoozer, 39.

[213] Vanhoozer, 39.

Jesus Christ.

The third turn in postmodernism was towards practice: culture and action. Postmodernity dismantled modernity's idea of society which was built on the ideal of rationality and individual autonomy.[214] Vanhoozer argues that postmodernity's focus on narrative shaped the tradition of an individual and a community, which further sustained certain cultural practices.[215] Hence, the practice of ecclesial community or ecclesiology became the first theology which controlled the way the story of Jesus was narrated.

The above briefly discussed postmodern turns prompted Vanhoozer's Theological hermeneutics. Vanhoozer responded to these various paradigm shifts of postmodernism by employing the concept or metaphor of Drama. The Drama metaphor assists Vanhoozer in interpreting the redemptive work of God in the Bible as Theo-drama. The 'how and why' of this assimilation will be discussed in the section, Vanhoozer's turn to Drama.

2.3.2.3 *Hermeneutical and contextual challenges of Contextual theology*

'Situatedness,' Postmodernity's brainchild, not only influenced theology in the West; it equally dismantled theology in the developing-world, which had been previously influenced by modernity's brainchild "reason". As a response, several developing-world theologies (similar to western postmodern theologies) overtly focussed on the context or situatedness of human beings in theology, instead of the canon. This approach in theology is quintessentially known as 'contextual theology.' Proponents of contextual theology, from both the southern and northern hemispheres, question the claim of the Western theological systems being universal.[216] In response, contextual theologians regard the theological systems of the west as contextual: Western and European. By questioning form, content, and categories of western theology, the so-called contextual theologians have become "bedfellows" with particular Western postmodern thinkers.[217] Both the contextual and the postmodern thinkers challenged modernity's universal formula approach in theology and thus brought forth the importance of plurality and situatedness in theology.

While analysing contextual theologies, Vanhoozer points out various turns or shifts within the contextual approach to theology. These turns are towards 'history and tradition, society and practice, and culture and identity,' and away from Western theology. It should be noted that these turns in contextual theology are not limited to the southern hemisphere. The following is Vanhoozer's observation regarding these various turns within contextual theology. The first turn in contextual theology was a turn to history and tradition from method and

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[214] Vanhoozer, 8.

[215] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Once More Into the Borderlands: The Way of Wisdom in Philosophy and Theology after the 'Turn to Drama,'" in *Transcending Boundaries in Philosophy and Theology: Reason, Meaning and Experience*, ed. Kevin Vanhoozer and Martin Warner, New edition (Aldershot, England ; Burlington, VT: Lund Humphries Pub Ltd, 2007), 40.

[216] David K. Strong and Cynthia A. Strong, "The Globalizing Hermeneutic of the Jerusalem Council," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), eBook format.

[217] Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All," 89.

epistemology. The greatest impact of postmodernity in contextual theology was the turn from 'epistemology: question of method to ontology: questions of human being.'[218] Vanhoozer argues that the method and content of contextual theology may not be the independent theological endeavour of contextual theology. Although it was Gadamer who proposed the limitation of one's situatedness and contextuality in one's thought, it was developing-world theologians who gave significant importance to the questions about human beings in theology. The focus of contextual theology is towards the hermeneutical circle which seeks to "relate the "world of the reader" (ones' political, cultural, social context) with the "world of the text"".[219] Consequently, contextual theology uses concrete human experience as the genesis of their theology instead of abstract philosophy, doctrine and biblical proof text.[220]

The second turn in the contextual theology was to society and practice from proposition. The turn to society and practice in contextual theology was against the logic and philosophy (metaphysics) of the western categories in theology, observes Vanhoozer. Instead, the new categories in contextual theology were neither methodology nor content, but 'location (where) and position (who).' A turn from 'orthodoxy to orthopraxis' and the new method was to 'see-judge-act' against poverty and oppression in social contexts.[221] Vanhoozer further qualifies the new methods as, "*see* (analyze the social situation), *judge* (discern God's reign), and *act* (practice the politics of the kingdom of God)."[222]

The third turn in the contextual theology was to 'rediscover one's cultural identity.' This turn was aimed at indigenous cultural resources as the '*material* and *resources* for doing theology'.[223] As an example, Vanhoozer points out that the material and resources of African theology were African traditional religious beliefs and practices. Now the aim of African theology is the 'Africanization of Christianity' and not the 'Christianization of Africa.'[224] The result of this hermeneutical turn within contextual theology was that both the gospel and cultural values were theologically enhanced.[225] In addition to the challenges from contextual theology, Vanhoozer specifically notes the challenge from religious pluralism.[226]

Vanhoozer's hermeneutical discontent is aimed at all three: modernity, postmodernity and contextual theology. He questions modernity's "human reason" which dominates the 'divine revelation,' postmodernity's "human creativity" which bypasses the 'divine command,'[227] and contextual theology

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[218] Vanhoozer, 93.

[219] Vanhoozer, 94.

[220] Vanhoozer, 95.

[221] Vanhoozer, 95–96.

[222] Vanhoozer, 97.

[223] Vanhoozer, 97.

[224] Vanhoozer, 97–98.

[225] Vanhoozer, 98.

[226] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The Triune God of the Gospel," in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed. Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 24.

[227] Vanhoozer, "Theology and the Condition of Postmodernity: A Report on Knowledge (of God)," 23.

which accentuates on context instead of canon. Vanhoozer explicitly emphasizes that neither modernity nor postmodernity has set his theological agenda but instead simply instigated it. His response is not one of compromise between these three but is rather a dispute with their method and content of hermeneutics. Yet he accommodates their method in his Theological hermeneutics.[228] As a result, Vanhoozer employs both human reason and human creativity, however, within divine revelation and divine command. Apart from disputing with postmodernity,[229] he sees an opportunity to show that the awareness postmodernity brought forth is not new but was always there in the Bible. A few examples given by Vanhoozer are, the finiteness of human reason, the situatedness of human reasoning, the sufficiency of Scripture in interpreting the nature of ultimate reality, and the focus on Christian faith as a story rather than a system.[230] In relation to the theological categories of contextual theologies, such as lived experience, social practices and cultural identity, Vanhoozer agrees that these categories have a rightful place in theology alongside the church tradition. However, their role should be a secondary one, only after the *primary source, Scripture.*[231] Also, a challenge from non-western Christianity (contextual turns discussed above) is met by emphasizing 'who' God is, instead of 'what' God is. That is, the focus is on God, who "has spoken and acted in concrete ways revealing his identity in history with Israel and ultimately in the history of Jesus Christ."[232]

2.3.3   Vanhoozer's turn to Drama: 'Theo-drama' in Theological hermeneutics: Assimilating hermeneutical challenges from modern, postmodern and contextual theology

2.3.3.1 Why drama?

It is not sufficient for the church to just voice a hermeneutical disagreement with modernity (universal method and reason), postmodernity (situatedness, linguistic, narrative, practice), and contextual theology (lived experience, social practices, and cultural identity). The church has to address the challenges posed by them. The pertinent question, however, is, how does Christian theology integrate the challenges posed by modernity, postmodernity and contextual theology? Vanhoozer, along with his hermeneutical disputation, proposes a way for Christian theology: a way that passes through all the turns. This way is "the turn to drama," which, according to him, amalgamates all the previous methods and directs them into one.[233] At the outset, Vanhoozer argues that employing the drama metaphor to view the gospel is not tantamount to the use of any extraneous framework to view the Gospel or theology. The effort is "… to make manifest

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[228] Vanhoozer, "Pilgrim's Digress: Christian Thinking on and about Post/Modern Way," Kindle format.
[229] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 26.
[230] Vanhoozer, "Pilgrim's Digress: Christian Thinking on and about Post/Modern Way," Kindle format.
[231] Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All," 106.
[232] Vanhoozer, "The Triune God of the Gospel," 28.
[233] Vanhoozer, "Once More Into the Borderlands: The Way of Wisdom in Philosophy and Theology after the 'Turn to Drama,'" 13.

their implicit content…."[234] To transcend hermeneutical boundaries in philosophy and theology, Vanhoozer argues for employing the drama metaphor to view the Gospel. Vanhoozer argues that the drama metaphor consolidates challenges posed by modernity and postmodernity. First, since drama anticipates acting (enactment)[235] both with words and actions (speech-act), drama integrates postmodernity's call for action or dialogical action. Second, drama includes narrative. Like narrative, drama too has plots. However, drama goes beyond narrative in responding to postmodernity, because in narration, one reads the story or tells it, whereas drama '*shows*' the performance. Third, drama is not just '*theoria*' but also theatrical, where the characters of the drama embody the language. Fourth, unlike the hermeneutical turn in modernity, which focussed on propositions, drama goes beyond the propositional method. The drama metaphor focuses on performance as well. Hence, after appropriating these arguments of drama, the gospel is perceived within the drama metaphor as Theo-drama. Theo-drama is built upon proposition and performance, a speech-act, which assimilates the previous turns of modernity and postmodernity.[236] The drama metaphor is considered an apt answer to the challenges posed by modernity and postmodernity.

It should be noted that Vanhoozer is aware of the fact that the emphasis on performance and the metaphor of drama has been utilized before in the writings of Hans Urs Von Balthasar (drama), NT Wright, and Ricoeur (performance).[237] However, Vanhoozer perseveres in viewing the Gospel with a theatrical metaphor, yet with a caveat. Although Vanhoozer employs the theatrical analogy, he is not engaging with a specific drama theory, rather he makes an ad hoc use of several elements of various drama theories, after judging the various concepts' compatibility with the gospel and Scripture.[238] It does seem however, that Vanhoozer prefers to work with a European drama theory rather than an American one. This observation is drawn from the fact that a significant element of European drama, the 'dramaturge', is comparatively unknown in American theatre.[239] The nature of all the elements of drama, including dramaturge, used by Vanhoozer will be outlined in the following section.

2.3.3.2 What is Drama, and how is it congruent with Theo-drama?

Since Vanhoozer does not follow a particular theory of drama, it would suffice to give a general pattern of drama and then mention the elements of drama Vanhoozer uses to view the Gospel. Bartholomew and Goheen employ Terence to state that in a second century BC drama format, drama followed a 'five-act play

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[234] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 38.

[235] Vanhoozer, 37.

[236] Vanhoozer, "Once More Into the Borderlands: The Way of Wisdom in Philosophy and Theology after the 'Turn to Drama,'" 13.

[237] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 30.

[238] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "A Drama-of-Redemption Model," in *Four Views on Moving beyond the Bible to Theology*, ed. Gary T. Meadors, 1 edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 155 and footnote 7.

[239] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 244.

structure.'[240] According to their observation, the five-act play is structured in the following way. Act 1 gives background information and introduction of the main characters. Act 2 unveils the plot, and discloses the main conflict. Act 3 is the main action of the plot. This is the part where the tension mounts and obfuscates the audience. Act 4 is the climax of the plot, where confusions resolve. Act 5 is about resolutions based on the implications drawn from the plot.[241] Vanhoozer also employs a five-act structure of drama in developing the doctrine of drama. Vanhoozer portions the drama of redemption into the following divisions. Act 1 is 'Creation' and everything that followed after creation until Genesis chapter 11. Act 2 is the election of Israel that begins with Genesis chapter 12 until the advent of Christ (Genesis 12- Malachi). Act 3 is about the focal centres of the plot, the life and work of Jesus Christ (the gospels). Act 4 is Pentecost, which begins with the resurrection of Christ and authorizing the creation of the church through the power of the Holy Spirit. (Acts- Jude). Act 5 is consummation or eschaton (Revelation). The present church is in the closing scenes of Act 4,[242] between Act 4 and Act 5, between the first and the second coming of Christ.[243] Vanhoozer indicates that there were other theologians who have used the drama metaphor to view the gospel. Vanhoozer mentions Wright's five-act play: creation, fall, Israel, Christ and the church,[244] Samuel Wells' five-act play: creation, Israel, Jesus, church and Eschaton,[245] Bartholomew and Goheen's six-act play: God establishes his kingdom: Creation, rebellion in the kingdom: Fall, the king chooses Israel: Redemption initiated, the coming of the King: Redemption accomplished, spreading the news of the king: The mission of the church, and the return of the King: Redemption completed.[246] Vanhoozer argues that the above mentioned theologians' drama scheme assist in comprehending drama, however, none of them sufficiently explain the nature of an act.[247] He argues that in theology an act should be perceived as " a vital ingredient in the historical outworking (i.e., economy) of the divine decree. As such, each act is "according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23)."[248] Vanhoozer specifically engages with Wright's five-act drama. Though both of them follow a five-act play structure to look at the Bible story, Vanhoozer differs from the way Wright portions out the five-act play of the Bible. For Wright, the five-act play of the Bible consists of

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[240] Terence's vision is mentioned in: Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*, 2 edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), The Biblical drama, Kindle edition.

[241] Bartholomew and Goheen, Prologue: the Bible as a Grand Story. Kindle format.

[242] A presentation by Kevin J. Vanhoozer for the Billy Graham center and Marion E. Wade center evangelism roundtable V "Imagination and the gospel: harnessing the imagination to engage contemporary culture and communicate the life-changing gospel" on April 23, 2008. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The Drama of the Christ: The Gospel as the Thing Done and Word Made," http://www.wheaton.edu/~/media/Files/Centers-and-Institutes/BGC/Roundtable/2008/2008-Session-3-Vanhoozer.pdf.

[243] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 2–3. Vanhoozer, "A Drama-of-Redemption Model," 174. For the Bible references refer to, Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding*, 98.

[244] N. T. Wright, "How Can the Bible Be Authoritative? (The Laing Lecture for 1989)," *Vox Evangelica*, no. 21 (1991): 7–32.

[245] Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), five act play, kindle edition.

[246] A summary of the main six-acts structure within kingdom of God overarching theme. Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, The biblical drama, kindle edition.

[247] Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding*, 97.

[248] Vanhoozer, 97.

creation, fall, Israel, Christ and the church. The fifth act, the church, is not yet realized because the church must improvise the script (the first four acts). Unlike Wright, Vanhoozer does not designate the fall as a distinct act; rather, he sees it as a 'conflict' within the first act-creation. Vanhoozer agrees with Wells who observes that including the fall as a distinct act may portray God as the author of the fall.[249] Also, Vanhoozer does not see the church as a fifth or a missing act. Rather, he argues that the church is in the fourth act between the first and the second coming of Christ (consummation) improvising the script to perform the gospel.[250]

It should be noted, however, that Vanhoozer neither considers every element of drama to have 'theological counterparts,' nor strictly draws analogies from them to view the gospel.[251] In fact, he warns against it, because drawing parallels will reduce the drama metaphor to a disconcerting allegory.[252] Instead, Vanhoozer picks elements of drama which are compatible with the story of redemption, analogies which portray clear points, and are compatible with the Scripture.[253] For example, portraying the canon as the script of a drama in a strict sense may jeopardize the theology of the Scripture. The script of a drama is written before the enactment of the drama, which is not the case with Theo-drama. Also, the canon should not be perceived as a template/script with every possible detail of the enactment. Instead, the script, that is the Bible, should be perceived as a " divinely authorized account, the normative specification of the theo-drama."[254] A few elements of the drama metaphor which Vanhoozer carries over into Theo-drama are: the gospel as drama, the canon as script, doctrine as direction, the Holy Spirit as the principal director, church officers (such as bishops, elders, and more importantly pastors) as assistant directors, and theologians as dramaturges.[255]

Further, Vanhoozer demonstrates how drama metaphor is above epic metaphor in understanding the redemptive work of Christ. In fact, Vanhoozer does not miss an opportunity to state its difference and its relevance in addressing hermeneutical challenges both from modernity and postmodernity. Vanhoozer observes that the epic metaphor seems to be employed by various theologians who see theology as universal truth, conceptualized through reason. Vanhoozer specifically points out Hodge and Bultmann, who assert that important teachings of the Bible are timeless truths and the Bible is a medium for this divine information.[256] What qualifies drama over the epic metaphor to make it congruent with the gospel? Vanhoozer argues for the superiority of a drama metaphor over an epic metaphor in identifying the gospel. He defines epic as, "history from one absolute perspective with a stylistic gravitas that gives to the events recounted a sense of inevitability."[257] Simply put, an epic is a long narration of story written

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[249] Wells, *Improvisation*, 52–53. Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding*, 97.
[250] Vanhoozer, "A Drama-of-Redemption Model," 174.
[251] Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding*, 246.
[252] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 243.
[253] Vanhoozer, "A Drama-of-Redemption Model," 155., Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding*, 246.
[254] Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding*, 246.
[255] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 243–44.
[256] Vanhoozer, 86.
[257] Vanhoozer, 85.

from an absolute perspective. However, while advocating for the drama metaphor to view the gospel, Vanhoozer states four fundamental realities of drama which are congruent with the gospel.[258] First, the fact that the story of the Bible is not just a universal truth but "God's redemptive words and deeds in the history of Israel that culminates in Jesus Christ, is inherently *theo-dramatic*, a matter of what God (*theos)* has said and done (*draō*) in history."[259] Second, the drama/theatrical metaphor entails speaking and acting as one: speech-act. The drama Speech-act image " bridges[s] the theory/practice dichotomy" demanding Christians to live (practice) the content (theory) of the Gospel.[260] Third, on the basis of the first two fundamentals, " the aim of Christian theology is… to cultivate disciples who can display the mind of Christ in every situation. Knowledge is static, but wisdom— lived knowledge— is dynamic and hence dramatic."[261] Fourth, since drama entails acting, and perceiving the Gospel as drama, it therefore necessitates every Christian to act out or perform the theo-drama by "participating in God's mission to a wanting world."[262] Having said that, Vanhoozer clarifies that the drama metaphor neither rejects nor gives special treatment to the propositions or universal truths present in the epics, but instead 'reclaims it' or 'rehabilitates it.'[263]

2.3.3.3 *What is theo-drama, and how is it related to theological hermeneutics?*

Having stated the congruence of the drama metaphor with the redemption of Christ, this section will explain what theo-drama is and how it is related to the theological hermeneutics of Vanhoozer. Theo-drama is "an account of what God – Father, Son, and Spirit – has said and done in creation and redemption."[264] In a drama structure, theo-drama is a five-act drama of God in 1) creation, 2) election of Israel, 3) the redemptive work of Jesus, 4) the sending of the church, and 5) the second coming of Jesus Christ. Vanhoozer observes that it was Balthasar's idea to use drama as a metaphor to view Scripture. For Balthasar " the best way to do justice to the content of Scripture is to employ dramatic rather than metaphysical categories."[265] The subject matter of the Scripture is gospel-centred theo-drama,[266] which presents God, the world and the church as covenant partners, who participate in a drama based on the love of God.[267] Vanhoozer presents God, the world and the church as agents of the theo-drama. The Triune God, as primary agent, makes a series of entrances, exits, and returns, in the same way as characters do in all dramas.

Vanhoozer points out several entrances, exits and returns of the Triune God in theo-drama. He states God entered the world as the creator to make a covenant

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[258] Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding*, 20–21.

[259] Vanhoozer, 20.

[260] Vanhoozer, 21.

[261] Vanhoozer, 21.

[262] Vanhoozer, 21.

[263] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 88.

[264] Vanhoozer, "The Triune God of the Gospel," 29.

[265] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 49.

[266] Vanhoozer et al., "Imprisoned or Free? Text, Status, and Theological Interpretation in the Master/Slave Discourse of Philemon," The Norm: Scripted Theodrama, Kindle format.

[267] Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. Vol. 1, Prolegomena (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988); in Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 49.

with human beings. For example, those entrances made with Adam, Noah, Abraham, priests, kings, prophets, and Israel as a community. Apart from God's entrance to make a covenant with human beings, He entered as God who provides for his people in need, as a protector from their enemies, as a judge to discipline his people, and as a sustainer to restore them after punishment. The primary, the greatest and climactic entrance of God, was done in Jesus Christ in the incarnation.[268]

Vanhoozer perceives the exits and exoduses as saving events. It should be noted that exits do not mean God leaving his people alone, but should be seen as a 'mighty salvific act of God in exit form.'[269] A few exits in the theo-drama are the exodus, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the ascension of Jesus Christ. Vanhoozer notes that all the exits were saving events: gospel in the exodus, and exodus in the gospel.[270] Though it might be thought that in using a drama metaphor this redemptive drama would end with the ascension of Jesus Christ. The theo-drama, however, will end only with the return of Jesus Christ, argues Vanhoozer. [271] Moreover, at present, the church is engaged in the last part of Act Four, enacting the theo-drama by improvising the script by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, while eagerly waiting to be in Act Five.

Having defined theo-drama, the question remains, how is theo-drama related to theological hermeneutics. It should be remembered that Vanhoozer further developed 'theological Hermeneutics' in *The Drama of Doctrine.* Vanhoozer's previous work on hermeneutical theory is strongly substantiated through theo-drama in *The Drama of Doctrine*. Vanhoozer asserts that theo-drama is about the " reformulation of the Scripture principle in terms of communicative action."[272] This reformulation is built upon Vanhoozer's five theses of Theological hermeneutics as mentioned before. To reiterate, the five theses of Theological hermeneutics are:

1. The ultimate authority for Christian theology is the triune God in communicative action.
2. A text's "plain meaning" or "natural sense" is the result of a person's communicative action.
3. To call the Bible "Scripture" is to acknowledge a divine intention that does not contravene, but supervenes on, the communicative intentions of its human author.
4. The theological interpretation of Scripture requires us to give "thick descriptions" of the canonical acts in the Bible performed by both the human and the divine author.
5. The norm of theological interpretation (namely, what an author has intentionally said/done), generates an interpretive aim: to bear competent witness to what an author has said/done. [273]

Vanhoozer states three significant aspects in the reformulation of the doctrine of Scripture when keeping theo-drama as the shaping metaphor. The first is that though it is true that theological hermeneutics argued for divine communication action, it now complements/enriches it with theo-drama, the subject matter of theology, where God is speaking and acting in Jesus Christ. Second, although the

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[268] A summary from Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding*, 90–93.

[269] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 40.

[270] Vanhoozer, 40.

[271] Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding*, 93.

[272] Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology," 69.

[273] Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 291–93.

Bible should be read like any other book with the focus on the authorial discourse, it should also be read differently, because the Bible is the revealed script of theo-drama for redemption. The fact that the Bible is about the self-manifestation of Jesus through the Holy Spirit makes it different from any other book. Third, Scripture is not just a record of the incarnation of Jesus Christ but it also gives due credit to the combined work of human authors in producing the Bible.[274] Theo-drama therefore is the continuation from Theological hermeneutics,[275] not as a 'conversion' but as an 'enrichment.'[276] Vanhoozer conveys the essence of Theological hermeneutics with theo-dramatic understanding. He elucidates,

> Theological hermeneutics is a matter, first, of grasping the basic plot—of being able to relate the various scenes in the theodrama to what God has done climactically in Jesus Christ—and, second, of grasping how we can go on following Christ in new situations so that our speech and action corresponds to the truth of the gospel. Theological hermeneutics is, in a word, a matter of theodramatic competence: the theological interpreter knows how to make sense of the drama of redemption both in terms of the biblical text and in terms of the contemporary experience of the church.[277]

Moreover, the theological task of theo-drama is in accordance with theological hermeneutics. Vanhoozer proposes the specific task of Theological hermeneutics, as "a matter not only of reading but of being read by the text; to be a true witness involves not only describing what God is saying/doing in Scripture but embodying this message."[278] Similarly, the theological task of theo-drama is, 'to determine what God has said in Scripture'[279] so that the performance of theo-drama is aimed at and appropriated in a contemporary context.[280]

Vanhoozer further describes the elements of drama and their theological counterparts in hermeneutical theology which addresses theo-drama in everyday situations. Accordingly, the dramatic roles which are mentioned in Vanhoozer's schema of theo-drama are: God as the playwright or the producer, the world as the stage, Jesus Christ as the lead actor, the gospel as theo-drama, the Holy Spirit as the principal director, the canon as script, the church officers (such as bishops, elders, and more importantly pastors) as assistant directors, theologians as dramaturges, and doctrine as direction. However, the work of a dramaturge /theologian has a significant place in drama, by being the person who appropriates the script both to the actors and the spectators. How does a dramaturge make sense of the script? Vanhoozer makes a few observations about the task of a dramaturge. He notes that the 'preproduction' work of a dramaturge is to help prepare the director and actors so that their act will stay true to the script's intention.[281] Vanhoozer expands on the preproduction work of a dramaturge. The

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[274] Vanhoozer et al., "Imprisoned or Free? Text, Status, and Theological Interpretation in the Master/Slave Discourse of Philemon," Scripture and Theodrama, Kindle format.

[275] Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology," 68.

[276] Vanhoozer et al., "Imprisoned or Free? Text, Status, and Theological Interpretation in the Master/Slave Discourse of Philemon," theological hermeneutics: from divine discourse to Theodrama, Kindle edition.

[277] Vanhoozer et al., Theological Interpretation: Theodramatic Understanding, Kindle edition.

[278] Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 308.

[279] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 241.

[280] Vanhoozer, 309.

[281] Vanhoozer, 245.

preproduction work involves the gathering of, 1) background information including historical, social, and cultural elements 2) compiling a profile of the 'playwright' 3) details of previous productions of the play and their consequent appraisal, 4) a detailed examination of the play, and 5) detailed resources which are helpful and related to the present play and its previous production.[282] That is to say that the dramaturge's work is both related to the script and the performance. However, the dramaturge's work related to the script should not be confused with that of a playwright, warns Vanhoozer. The Playwright, God, is the author, and a theologian is a dramaturge. The work of the theologian therefore is script-oriented, determining what God has said in Scripture, and continues to say regarding the performance of the play in a contemporary context. Vanhoozer categorizes the task of a dramaturge/theologian as *Scientia* and *Sapientia* approaches to theology. On a query pertaining to the possibility of the pastors taking up the role of a dramaturge, Vanhoozer asserts that pastors too can take up the role of the dramaturge. Vanhoozer states, " … there is no reason why the pastor cannot also be a dramaturge. In fact, I imply as much in the conclusion. Giving sapiential sermons is the pastor's prime directive, and it consists in giving sound direction—understanding—to the congregation."[283]

2.4 Reframing the Authority of Scripture in Theological Hermeneutics: Expanding the Reformed view of Scripture

In order to answer the main question of this research, that is: the relevance of Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology of the authority of Scripture within the Reformed tradition in India, we need to focus on the way he claims his doctrine of Scripture is Reformed. Therefore, the present section will demonstrate how Vanhoozer expands the Reformed view of Scripture while reframing the authority of Scripture in hermeneutical theology. It should be noted however, that the aim of this section is not an encyclopaedic study of the Reformed theology of Scripture, but an account of Vanhoozer's use of the Reformed doctrine of Scripture in connection with addressing challenges from contextual theology.

2.4.1   General observation: Reformed emphasis in Vanhoozer's works

Even a perfunctory look at theological hermeneutics suggests that Vanhoozer's hermeneutics is based on Reformed theology in general, and a Reformed theology of Scripture in particular. It is apparent, both in the arguments and explicit claims of Vanhoozer, that a Reformed emphasis has been his agenda. Vanhoozer, in the introduction of his writings, has explicitly mentioned that Reformed Theology governs his works.[284] Similarly, in *Is There Meaning in the*

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[282] A summary of Vanhoozer's description of dramaturge, Vanhoozer, 245.

[283] Andreas Köstenberger, "Vanhoozer Response to My Review | Biblical Foundations," accessed February 26, 2015, http://www.biblicalfoundations.org/vanhoozer-responds-to-my-review/.

[284] Vanhoozer has explicitly mentioned in an interview that his book Remythologizing Theology is built upon a Reformed emphasis on divine sovereignty. Guy Davies, "Exiled Preacher: Remythologizing Theology: An Interview with Kevin Vanhoozer," accessed March 9, 2010, http://exiledpreacher.blogspot.nl/2010/03/remythologizing-theology-interview-with.html.

Text, Vanhoozer claims to argue for "author-oriented interpretation through a creative retrieval of Reformed theology and speech-act philosophy."[285] In another instance, Vanhoozer expresses his desire to look carefully over the work of Calvin in the *Institutes* as he searches for ways to build bridges to relate canon to concept.[286] In *The Drama of Doctrine*, Vanhoozer has made a passing comment in the introduction of the book that he belongs to a Presbyterian church.[287] In his response to an interview question by Eric J. Johnson, about his theological and church identity, Vanhoozer replied,

> …I accept the label "evangelical" when it refers to "that which corresponds to the gospel of Jesus Christ," where "gospel" refers both to the content and the form of the Christian Scriptures. …As I understand the term, "evangelical" refers to those who share this fundamental orientation.
>
> Because no one people group owns the gospel, I also accept the label "catholic" meaning the "whole" church…. Finally, I accept the label "Reformed" because I think this branch of Protestant Reformation represents a particularly helpful expression of the way to be a catholic evangelical. I am thus a Reformed catholic evangelical.[288]

However, it should be noted that Vanhoozer is amused by the criticism he receives, on the one hand, for pushing a Reformed confessional framework in his approach to theology and, on the other hand, for being ecumenical.[289] In fact, in most of his interviews (and Vanhoozer himself admits this in *The Drama of Doctrine*), people are curious to know his ecclesial commitment. The confusion in locating Vanhoozer's ecclesial affiliation is due to the fact that his Theological hermeneutics falls within a hermeneutical revolution, namely the 'Theological interpretation of Scripture' which is propagated by theologians from diverse confessional affiliations, including liberals. Vanhoozer does not use Reformed sources exclusively in his approach to theology, instead he selects a few significant elements. Glimpses of Reformed theology can be seen in Vanhoozer's work, such as: the appearance of key Reformed theological themes, and references to Reformed scholars and Confessions. Examples of these themes are his Christocentric focus[290], his focuses on Sola Scriptura (canon principle),[291] covenant (material principle), the sovereignty of God, sovereign grace, Augustinian hermeneutics[292] and his Trinitarian emphasis in theo-drama.[293] Along with

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[285] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 10.

[286] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "From Canon to Concept: 'Same' and 'Other' in the Relation Between Biblical and Systematic Theology," April 13, 1994, 96, http://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/sbet/12-2_096.pdf.

[287] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, xii.

[288] Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Eric. L. Johnson, "Interview with Kevin J. Vanhoozer: What Does It Mean to Be Biblical? What Should Biblical Authority Look Like in the 21st Century?," *Edification: The Transdisciplinary Journal of Christian Psychology* 4, no. 1 (2010): 76.

[289] Köstenberger, "Vanhoozer Response to My Review | Biblical Foundations."

[290] Kevin J Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority After Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity*, Ebook edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), In Christ Alone, Ebook format.

[291] Vanhoozer, "Scripture and Tradition.", Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*.

[292] Vanhoozer's Theological hermeneutics is inherently built upon Augustinian hermeneutics, however, for specific reference refer to Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 29–32.

[293] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*.Vanhoozer, *First Theology*., Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*,Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*.

Reformed themes, Vanhoozer has also employed the Reformed confessions[294] as a theological basis for his argument. Paul Helm considers Vanhoozer to be the most able theologian, from the confessional Reformed camp, to creatively address the contemporary discussion on theological method.[295]

2.4.2   Defining "Reformed" in Reformed authority of Scripture

Who is Reformed? What is a Reformed theology of Scripture? Henry Van Til asserts that the Reformed faith is based on Calvin's *Institutes* and is propagated by theologians like A. Kuyper, H. Bavinck, K. Schilder, C. Hodges, B.B Warfield, G. Vos, etcetera.[296] Fred H. Klooster, on the other hand, says that the Reformed label was originally used for the entirety of Protestant Christianity covering the Lutheran, Zwinglian, and Calvinist branches. Later, the term was particularly used for Calvinist Churches on the European continent.[297] He further argues that there are two main positions from where a person can begin to do Reformed theology. The first is the old Princeton position enunciated within Presbyterian Churches of British rootage represented by, for example, B.B Warfield. The second is developed in the Old Amsterdam position propagated by A. Kuyper. R. Michael Allen, however, suggests that instead of asking what Reformed theology is, we should instead ask, which churches are Reformed.[298] Henry Van Til asserts that the first principle of Calvinism is the belief in the Scripture as God's Word, which has supreme authority and is adequate for matters related to faith and living.[299] Reymond echoes this sentiment in regards to the Calvinistic belief that the Bible is the "ultimate authority" and sufficient for "matters of belief and behavior."[300] Vanhoozer mentions that Calvin insists on the status of Scripture. For Calvin, true knowledge of God can be attained only through the "Scripture's ''spectacles of faith'' and the illumination of the Holy Spirit."[301]

Yet A.T.B McGowan warns against any one Reformed camp claiming exclusive rights to the definition of the word 'Reformed' in theology. In fact, he

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[294] For example Westminster Shorter Catechism, Westminster Confession of Faith. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 276, 338, 339. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel*. Calvin's Catechism of the Church of Geneva, Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Owen Strachan, *Pastor as Public Theologian, The: Reclaiming a Lost Vision* (Brazos Press, 2015), Catechist: Teaching what is in Chris, eBook format. Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 196.

[295] Paul Helm, *Faith, Form, and Fashion: Classical Reformed Theology and Its Postmodern Critics* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2014), Introduction, eBook format.

[296] Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*, Kindle version (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1971), chapter IV, Kindle version.

[297] Fred H. Klooster, "How Reformed Theologians 'Do Theology' in Today's World," in *Doing Theology in Today's World: Essays in Honor of Kenneth S. Kantzer.*, ed. John D. Woodbridge and Thomas Edward McComiskey (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing house, 1995), 227.

[298] For a comprehensive discussion on the identity of Reformed theology/churches, refer to R. Michael Allen, *Reformed Theology*, 1 edition (London/New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2010).

[299] Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*, chapter X, Kindle version.

[300] Robert L. Reymond, "Calvin's Doctrine of Holy Scripture," in *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, ed. David W Hall and Peter A Lillback (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Pub., 2008), 49.

[301] Vanhoozer, "The Triune God of the Gospel," 21.

argues that Reformed theology is a school of thought with many strands, and the Calvinistic strand is simply one strand within this school of thought.[302] Answering the question, "What is Reformed?" becomes a cumbersome task because of the glut of information available on the identity of Reformed theology and Reformed theologians. There is also no common consensus on what Reformed theology is, and which Reformed camp is the authentic follower of Reformed theology.

Having stated the conundrum in actually defining what is Reformed, this research will settle with describing the identity of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of India (RPCI), the church in which this research is located. The purpose of describing the Reformed identity of the RPCI is to consider Vanhoozer as a real possible contributor towards Reformed hermeneutics in India. It will suffice to mention a few common characteristics of the RPCI which are used in worship and teaching both in ecclesia and academia, though they by no means make an exhaustive list. The belief in the doctrine of God's grace summarized in the acronym TULIP; the five Solas (*sola Scriptura*, *solus Christus, sola Gratia, sola Fide, soli deo Gloria*), which summarize the teaching of the Reformation; the three forms of unity which detail the Reformed faith (the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, and the Heidelberg Catechism); creeds and confessions of faith (the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms). The Reformed churches in India adhere to most of the above summaries of Reformed doctrine, though they pay special attention to the three forms of unity and the Westminster Confessions of Faith (including the Larger and Shorter Catechisms).[303] However, the distinctive overarching characteristic of the Reformed theology of RPCI is that the Scripture, both the Old and New Testaments, are accepted as the primary authority for belief and Christian living, with the Westminster Standards as the official documents. The Form of Government of the RPCI says,

> The written Word of God consisting of the sixty six books of the Holy Scripture is the final and infallible authority for all the doctrine, government and life of this Church. RPCI affirms the Westminster Standards (the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms) as its subordinate standard, subject to the Scriptures and conveying a faithful interpretation of them.[304]

James E. McGoldrick observes of Indian Church history that Reformed and Presbyterian Churches have exclusively subscribed to the Westminster standards as their official ecclesial documents.[305] RPCI also follows the Reformed heritage of the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA) which is considered to be Classical Reformed theology. Two prominent Reformed theologians within Classical Reformed theology are Warfield and Hodge, two theologians with whom Vanhoozer has interacted. Through critical dialogue with Warfield and Hodge,

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[302] A. T. B McGowan, "Crafting an Evangelical, Reformed, and Missional Theology for the Twenty-First Century," in *Reformed Means Missional: Following Jesus Into the World*, ed. Samuel T. Logan, JR, eBook (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2013), School-Not Strand-of thought, eBook.

[303] Presbyterian Theological Seminary, India, "What Is Presbyterian?," accessed March 9, 2015, http://www.ptsindia.com/inner.php?pid=2.

[304] "Form of Government: The Reformed Presbyterian Church of India," Revised 2010, 12.

[305] James E. McGoldrick, *Presbyterian and Reformed Churches: A Global History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 469.

this section will explore the expansion of the Reformed theology of Scripture in Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology.

Accordingly, this section will mention some significant points of Vanhoozer's interaction with Warfield and Hodge and their theology of Scripture. After doing so, this study will then show how Vanhoozer expands on the Reformed theology of Scripture. The question being asked is: How does Vanhoozer go beyond the Reformed view of Scripture, building on it and positively expanding its reach? In other words, how does Vanhoozer expand the Reformed view of Scripture without undermining it, contradicting it, or going against the Reformed faith? Vanhoozer perceives Warfield's theology of scripture as "the received view", which believes in the authority of Scripture because it is propositional revelation, verbal inspiration and infallible authority. Vanhoozer observes: "For B.B. Warfield, the Bible is authoritative Scripture because it contains revealed propositions."[306] Vanhoozer points out that in Warfield's view, the revelation is orally revealed truths, meant for sacred teaching, formulated in canon. Hence, the Bible is authoritative in its cognitive content.[307] The nature of the revelation is seen in Warfield's understanding of verbal inspiration, which is that though human authors wrote the Bible, they did so "under such an influence of the Holy Ghost as to be also the words of God, the adequate expression of His mind and will."[308] Hence, the word of God is considered authoritative not just for matters pertaining to salvation but also for history and science and other disciplines. Vanhoozer is apprehensive about Warfield's view of scripture because it limits the Scripture to propositional revelation alone, and the revealed truth of God simply becomes the data used to study theology and other disciplines. Warfield's view does not give enough importance to human authors. He is overly cautious in his articulation of the involvement of the human authors who wrote the Bible.[309] Moreover, this view tends to present biblical infallibility as magical, and tempts the reader to use the Bible as a talisman or an idol (bibliolatry).[310]

Similarly, Charles Hodge perceived the Bible as the "…deposit of revealed truth."[311] Hodge, observes Vanhoozer, derived his theology of Scripture by appropriating the inductive method of natural science. Hence, the tendency was to reduce the Bible to mere propositions, and misuse it as an authoritative source for studying science, history and geography. For Hodge, "the Bible contains revealed data, not only soteric data (e.g., gospel truths of salvation), but scientific, historical, and geographical data as well…"[312] Hodges' doctrine of Scripture is similar to Warfield's.[313] In their view, the Bible is a storehouse of facts, and doctrine is the result of an inductive and deductive study of the Bible: a processing of divine information. They tend to see Scripture as revelation, and

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[306] Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 29-30.

[307] Vanhoozer, 132.

[308] Benjamin B. Warfield, The Inspiration and the Authority of the Bible (Philipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), 173 in Vanhoozer, 133.

[309] Vanhoozer, 134.

[310] Vanhoozer, 131–34.

[311] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, And Hermeneutics," in *Whatever Happened to Truth?*, ed. Andreas J. Kostenberger et al. (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2005), 100.

[312] Vanhoozer, 100.

[313] Vanhoozer, 100–101.

revelation as something that conveys information.[314] Further, their doctrine undermines the context and the forms of the language and literature in the Bible.[315] However, it is worth noting that Vanhoozer tends to validate his method of Theological hermeneutics by pointing out that Warfield's construal of Scripture is based on his construal of God as it is interpreted in the Reformed confessions. That is, since God is completely sovereign over history, therefore, every detail in the writing of the biblical texts is provided by God and is in accordance with God's will.[316] To reiterate, in Theological hermeneutics the questions related to the doctrine of Scripture are inextricably intertwined with the communication action of the Triune God, the doctrine of God. Thus, Vanhoozer's views on the doctrine of Scripture correspond with his formation of doctrine of God.

Having briefly discussed Vanhoozer's critical appraisal of Reformed theologians, the following section will now describe Vanhoozer's doctrine of Scripture, expanding or moving beyond the Reformed doctrine of Scripture.

2.4.3   Expanding on the Reformed doctrine of Scripture

The following is a study of various theological categories of the doctrine of Scripture propounded by Vanhoozer, in interaction with a Reformed theology of Scripture.

The first theological category is the inspiration of Scripture. Vanhoozer observes that in a classical Reformed theology of the inspiration of Scripture, the Bible is understood as "a supernaturally caused book of eternal truths."[317] This view neither takes into consideration the participation of God's communicative action, nor the involvement of the Holy Spirit who leads the worshipping church in the process of participating in Scripture. As a result, biblical texts are depicted as "surrogate divine agent[s]," or worse, the Bible is considered the fourth part of the Godhead alongside the Trinity.[318] Inspiration, however, is the work of the Holy Spirit, who, 'commissioned, authorized, and appropriated' biblical texts for the use of the church to worship God, and who continues to illuminate the present reader today, argues Vanhoozer.[319] Since Scripture is not just God's Word but also God's Act, the inspiration of Scripture therefore, should be weighed within the Divine communication action, where God's words, the process of producing God's word, and illuminating are finally God's.[320] More pointedly, Vanhoozer reframed the definition of inspiration with a theo-dramatic understanding as "a matter of the Spirit's prompting the human authors to say just what the divine playwright intended."[321] The metaphor of prompting in this reframed understanding implies 'witnessing, urging, assisting, recalling to mind, supplying

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[314] Vanhoozer, 101.

[315] Vanhoozer, 103.

[316] Benjamin B. Warfield, The Inspiration and the Authority of the Bible, 157 in Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 143 For detailed discussion, refer to pages 25-40.

[317] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 226–27.

[318] Vanhoozer, 226–27.

[319] Vanhoozer, 226.

[320] Vanhoozer, 226.

[321] Vanhoozer, 227.

the right word, and articulating'.[322] This reframed understanding of inspiration, according to Vanhoozer, affirms both the sanctified contribution of human authors and the work of the Holy Spirit. However, Vanhoozer's emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit should not be misconstrued as an independent initiative of the Holy Spirit. Vanhoozer is aware of the danger of the postliberal perception of the work of the Holy Spirit, where a church community decides the meaning of the text, claiming to be inspired by the Holy Spirit. Vanhoozer elucidates the Holy Spirit's communicative activity as limited to what He receives (John 16:13). In other words, the Holy Spirit devotes to the texts (illocutionary act) only that which is "already inscribed in the biblical text."[323] Vanhoozer, in his reconstruction, refers to the Westminster Confession of Faith, which bestows absolute authority to "the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture."[324]

Vanhoozer follows a similar argument concerning canonization of the Scripture where both the divinely revealed data and God's action in history are equally significant. Vanhoozer argues, canonization is not "divinely revealed information only but a set of divine communicative practices into which the Spirit draws the church in order to participate and get understanding."[325] Vanhoozer affirms, "The Canonical Scriptures have *primal* and *final* authority because just these communicative acts and practices are the chosen media the Spirit uses to inform us of Christ, and to form Christ in us so that we may speak and act in our own situations to the glory of God"[326]

The second theological category is the authority of Scripture. Vanhoozer felt the need to rearticulate a Reformed theology of the authority of Scripture because of the way fundamentalists have often ignored the literary forms in which the gospel is communicated in the biblical texts, treating them simply as a textual shell to be discarded after extracting their content. In order to reframe the Reformed authority of Scripture, Vanhoozer inquires, "Is biblical authority—Scripture's *rightful say-so*—solely a matter of *what* than *how* it is said, a question of content rather than form?"[327] Vanhoozer invokes Barr's criticism of the method of fundamentalists. Barr retaliates against fundamentalists for their neglect of literary genre. Ignoring literary genre in any theology of the authority of the Bible endangers the very function of the Bible.[328] On a similar note, Vanhoozer argues that biblical authority *"is a matter not only of revealed information (i.e., propositions) but also of larger-scale patterns of information processing (i.e., poetics)."*[329] In other words, if the literary forms of the Bible are overlooked and the emphasis is only on the revealed information, the reader's ability to appropriate the Scripture is jeopardized, that is "the [reader's] ability to employ

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[322] Vanhoozer, 227.

[323] Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 198.

[324] Vanhoozer, 196.See WCF I. X, refer to Robert Shaw, *An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith*, n.d., chapter one, section ten. Kindle edition.

[325] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 229.

[326] Vanhoozer, 237.

[327] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Love's Wisdom: The Authority of Scripture's Form and Content for Faith's Understanding and Theological Judgment," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 5, no. 3 (January 1, 2011): 248, https://doi.org/10.1163/156973111X608507.

[328] James Barr, *The Bible in the Modern World* (London: SCM, 1973), 125; in Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 270–71.

[329] Vanhoozer, "Love's Wisdom," 251.

knowledge of discernment, good judgment, and right living."[330] Hence, biblical authority constitutes God's revealed information (content), in the words of others, such as prophets, kings, apostles, disciples, believers and unbelievers (forms), whom God used in his multifaceted communication action in presenting Jesus Christ. The Bible is the authoritative spectacle, but it is multi-focal (diverse literary forms) and not just bi-focal (Old Testament and New Testament).[331] This results in both the kernel (content) and the husk (literary forms) remaining authoritative together. In Vanhoozer's view, regaining the significance of the authority of literary forms along with the content not only guides the believer to understand but also guides them to make a theological judgment of the gospel in any given context. Vanhoozer demonstrates his reframed authority of Scripture by referring to a testimony of God stated in Matthew 3:17; 17:5, "This is my beloved son." However, if this testimony, an eternal propositional truth, were considered authoritative without including the form in which it was said, the interpretation would remain problematic because this proposition could be interpreted to mean anything. It could mean that God adopted Jesus during his baptism, or it could be perceived as a royal declaration. Instead of presenting biblical texts in isolation, if we consider the authority of the literary form (that is, narrative in this context) in which the baptism and transfiguration of Jesus Christ took place, the reader will better understand the communication action of God in history. In fact, a reader can recognize similar overtones from other Scripture passages like Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1.[332] In Theological hermeneutics, therefore, the authority of Scripture is perceived in the triune economy of God's communicative action: locution, illocution and perlocution, which means, "The ultimate authority for Christian theology is the triune God speaking-acting in the Scripture."[333] This is even true for Revelation. Revelation is not merely a communication of data or information, but "It is an act of God Himself", that is, God's pleasure in participating in and upon the world through communication action.[334]

This leads us to the next category of the doctrine of the Scripture, the sufficiency of Scripture. At the outset, it should be mentioned that Vanhoozer believes that Scripture has "everything that God deemed necessary and sufficient for the doctrinal, moral and spiritual welfare of this covenant people."[335] However, how does the sufficiency of Scripture work? First, it works in a formal sense. Vanhoozer argues, the diverse literary forms in the Bible sufficiently validate that the Bible is the communicative-act-word of God in history. Second, the truth communicated by the Bible is adequate such that human minds can understand what God is doing in Christ.[336] We cannot know everything about God from the Scripture. However, the Scripture is sufficient so that human beings can respond to God, and "to trust the promises, obey the commands, heed the warnings, sing the songs, believe the assertions, and hope for the ending."[337] Vanhoozer explains

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[330] Vanhoozer, 250.

[331] Vanhoozer, "From Canon to Concept: 'Same' and 'Other' in the Relation Between Biblical and Systematic Theology," 113.

[332] Vanhoozer, "Love's Wisdom," 269.

[333] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 67.

[334] Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology," 70, 73.

[335] Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 132.

[336] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 291.

[337] Vanhoozer, 291.

the sufficiency of the Scripture in this way: "What primarily makes the Bible "Scripture" is its being set apart by God for a special role in the broader economy of redemption and only secondarily its recognition as such in the church."[338] The doctrine of Scripture can be summed up in Vanhoozer's canonical triangulation: the mighty acts of God in Christ, God's communication act with human authors, and the work of the Holy Spirit in prompting the human authors.[339] In one of his lectures on the adequacy of the Bible, Vanhoozer concludes with the significance of the doctrine and its relation to Scripture. He says,

> We must attend to the particular literary forms of the canon in order to do theology, and to live, according to the Scriptures. In so doing, we sharpen our concepts and shape our community. This is the way to render reality as revealed by God's Word. This is the way to 'sound' the canon to the glory of God.[340]

The next theological category is Sola Scriptura: the relationship between Scripture and the Church. Although it is not a theological category per se, it is however a very significant theological consideration in the doctrine of Scripture and was one of the catalysts for instigating the Reformation. The sufficiency and authority of Scripture is best represented in the Reformed slogan *Sola Scriptura,* which means Scripture alone. Vanhoozer affirms, "*Sola Scriptura* means that Scripture alone is the supreme normative standard for Christian faith and life. This means that Scripture is also the norm and criterion for Jesus Christ: we have no other authorized and infallible testimony to Christ aside from the Scripture."[341] However, often times, sola scriptura is confused with solo scriptura, i.e. the scripture without church and tradition. In fact, the value of, and the relationship between the Scripture and extra biblical sources, such as tradition and reason, has been a burning topic both in modernity and postmodernity hermeneutical debates. Vanhoozer clarifies, *sola scriptura* does not mean Bible only in interpretation, but it means a rejection of "the elevation of noncanonical, and hence human, traditions that were thought to supplement the revelation given in Scripture."[342] Reformers protested against the Roman Catholic Church's authority and control over the Bible, but not against the role of the church in Bible interpretation. The Reformers fought for the status of the Bible. They also wanted the Bible to be handed to the lay people so that they too could have the privilege of reading the Bible in their native languages, and the responsibility of interpreting the Bible.[343] This protest was based on the Reformer's belief in the priesthood of all believers.

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[338] Vanhoozer et al., "Imprisoned or Free? Text, Status, and Theological Interpretation in the Master/Slave Discourse of Philemon," Kindle edition.

[339] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "On the Very Idea of a Theological System: An Essay in Aid of Triangulating Scripture, Church and World," in *Always Reforming: Explorations in Systematic Theology*, ed. Andrew T. B. McGowan (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2007), 171.

[340] Vanhoozer, "From Canon to Concept: 'Same' and 'Other' in the Relation Between Biblical and Systematic Theology," 124.

[341] Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel*, Sola Scripture ofr the Bible, Church, and Interpretive authority, eBook format.

[342] Vanhoozer, "Scripture and Tradition," 149.

[343] Vanhoozer, 149.,Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology," 86.

However, if *sola scriptura* is taken to mean *only Bible* without the church and tradition in hermeneutics, then, the Bible has no future, argues Vanhoozer.[344] Vanhoozer uses the analogy of the sun for Scripture, and moon as church tradition, where "what light, and authority, tradition bears, it does so by virtue of reflecting what shines forth from Scripture."[345] Precisely, due to this reason, the Reformers were not against the church and tradition in interpretation; as long as the Bible and noncanonical sources were not considered equal.[346] Vanhoozer's redefinition of *sola scriptura* is also reflected in his argument for theo-dramatic triangulation. "Theodramatic triangulation relates what God does in Christ, the Scripture that presents Christ, and the Word-and-Spirit guided practices of the church, the body of Christ."[347]

Thus, Vanhoozer's reframed theology of Scripture is apparent in the five theses of Theological hermeneutics, which acknowledge both the performance of the triune God and human authors. Vanhoozer attempts to bring to attention not just the work of God in the doctrine of Scripture, as traditional theologies do. But he also emphasizes the prominence of the role of the human authors and the function of literary genres, which have a significant place in a postmodern view of Scripture. In fact, Vanhoozer's emphasis on God (Divine action) in producing the Scripture is shown within the Triune work of God, with significant emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit who prompted the human authors. It is noteworthy how Vanhoozer retrieves and expands the Reformed theology of Scripture. In a similar tone, Calvin acknowledges the contribution of the literary genres in the communication of the Scriptures. Calvin says,

> I confess, however, that in elegance and beauty, nay, splendour, the style of some of the prophets is not surpassed by the eloquence of heathen writers. By examples of this description, the Holy Spirit was pleased to show that it was not from want of eloquence he in other instances used a rude and homely style. But whether you read David, Isaiah, and others of the same class, whose discourse flows sweet and pleasant; or Amos the herdsman, Jeremiah, and Zechariah, whose rougher idiom savours of rusticity; that majesty of the Spirit to which I adverted appears conspicuous in all.[348]

Vanhoozer definitely brings this out in his articulation of the theology of the Triune work of God, while retrieving and developing Calvin's assertion about the importance of the literary genres, and the prompting of the human authors by the Holy Spirit in producing the Bible. One of the theses of Theological hermeneutics argues that, "To call the Bible "Scripture" is to acknowledge a divine intention that does not contravene, but supervenes on, the communicative intentions of its human author."[349] Acknowledgment of the meaningful contribution of human beings in the production of the Bible has minimal mention in traditional Reformed theology, yet it has found a meaningful place in Vanhoozer's theology of

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[344] Vanhoozer, "Scripture and Tradition," 167.

[345] Vanhoozer, 150.

[346] Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel*, Sola Scriptura: What the Reformers meant. eBook.

[347] Vanhoozer, "On the Very Idea of a Theological System: An Essay in Aid of Triangulating Scripture, Church and World," 166.

[348] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, first electronic edition, The Fig Classic Series (Fig, 2012), section 1.8.2 Kindle version.

[349] Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 292.

Scripture. The tension in the Reformed theology of Scripture, however, remains in articulating how the role of the human authors interacts with the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in producing the Bible. Calvin argues that literary genres do not impinge on the work of the Triune God, whereas Vanhoozer purports that Divine intention supervenes the intention of human authors or literary genres. It may be appropriate to say that while Calvin does not reject the role of the human author altogether, Vanhoozer does not underwrite the adequacy and uniqueness of the Scripture in the way he credits human beings for their role in producing the Bible, which is within the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Hence, Vanhoozer may seem congruent with Calvin, when the latter says,

> The prophets and apostles boast not their own acuteness or any qualities which win credit to speakers, nor do they dwell on reasons; but they appeal to the sacred name of God, in order that the whole world may be compelled to submission…. [O]ur conviction of the truth of Scripture must be derived from a higher source than human conjectures, Judgments, or reasons; namely, the secret testimony of the Spirit.[350]

2.5 Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology: Implementing a reframed authority of Scripture

Vanhoozer proposes "a six-fold path" as a canonical-linguistic approach to implement his hermeneutical theology. He divides the six-fold path into two categories. Namely, *Scientia*: 'to determine what God has said in Scripture,'[351] and *Sapientia*: to aim at and situate theo-drama in a contemporary context.[352]

2.5.1 Towards a *scientia* approach: Determining what God has said in Scripture

Vanhoozer develops a *scientia* approach in doing theology. The word *scientia* refers to the scientific part of theology. For Vanhoozer, science is to investigate 'a reality'. This implies that theology, too, is a science, which explores a reality–'the communication action of God' which is completely fulfilled in Jesus Christ and articulated by God in Scripture.[353] More pointedly, "Theology as *scientia* is thus a matter of holy reasoning about, with, and from Holy Scripture."[354] Hence, Vanhoozer's approach to theology is "a theo-dramatic *scientia,* a principled approach to the theo-drama that has the canon as its script and Christ as its climax."[355] This requires theology, as a science, to make a cognitive examination of the communicative action of God so that the church can be committed to Jesus Christ. This task entails exegetical work by a theologian. Vanhoozer defines exegesis as a "disciplined" and not an independent task, which astutely studies the historical, literary and canonical background of the communicative work of God, pre-structured in the Scripture by human authors, but prompted by the divine

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[350] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, section 1.7.4 Kindle version.
[351] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 241.
[352] Vanhoozer, 309.
[353] Vanhoozer, 248.
[354] Vanhoozer, 293.
[355] Vanhoozer, 248.

playwright.[356] This suggests that a theologian is a disciplined scientist who is committed to the certain boundaries of canon and who strives to construct intellectual and spiritual formation.[357] He inquires as to what an exegesis within the scheme of theo-dramatic *scientia* should look like. Consequently, Vanhoozer proposes the theo-dramatic *Scientia* approach as a postpropositionalist, postconservative and postfoundationalist theology, the first triad in the six-fold path of canonical-linguistic approach to developing theology.

2.5.1.1 Postpropositionalist approach to theology

Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology views the relationship between theology and the biblical text differently from a traditional method of exegesis, namely the propositionalist approach. The main flaw in the propositionalist approach is that "it reduces the variety of speech action in the canon to one type: the assertion."[358] Further, "its view of language, Scripture, knowledge, and, for that matter, God is too small."[359] Thus, theology for propositionalists is limited to 'processing the propositional information.' Without ridiculing the proponents of this approach, Vanhoozer points out the exegetical approach of the sixteenth, seventeenth and twentieth century approaches in Protestant scholastics such as Hodge, Warfield and Henry. Their exegetical aim was to excavate and 'preserve' the propositional nugget from the Bible.[360] He further argues that the propositional approach seems to employ a pictorial-referential theory of language. Vanhoozer substantiates his argument by citing Murphy's criticism on propositionalists.[361] Murphy critiques the propositionalist use of language mainly for its limitation as a 'matter of picturing' or 'referring to the external world'.[362] This approach has similarities to Wittgenstein's picture theory of proposition, where "words refer to objects and sentences refer to empirical facts."[363] Furthermore, Vanhoozer mentions two factors he deems significant, employed in propositional theology, but which end up reducing the theology to a mere 'processing of information'. The first is the desperation in developing theology on one preferred 'conceptual scheme' or 'monologic'. Vanhoozer elucidates, while scholastic theologians preferred Greek conceptual schemes, theology in the modern period fell prey to 'modern rationality,' which aimed at extracting information through reason, and postmodernity (as a reaction to modernity's 'one size fits all') gave importance to several conceptual forms of doing theology.[364]

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[356] Vanhoozer, 249.

[357] Vanhoozer, 250–51.

[358] Vanhoozer, 266.

[359] Vanhoozer, 268.

[360] Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, And Hermeneutics," 100–102 Much has been said about their propositional approach mentioned earlier under the rubric 'Vanhoozer's theology of scripture'. Hence, it will suffice simply to name their approach here. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 267.

[361] Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1996), 2, 32–46.

[362] Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology," 75.

[363] Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, And Hermeneutics," 102.

[364] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 268–70.

The second factor is a reaction to the first approach. That is, it perceives theology from a preferred conceptual theme which results in using information extracted from the Bible as the proof-text for one's doctrinal point.[365] Vanhoozer vehemently argues that this deemed approach by the propositionalists eliminated the importance of 'dialogical action' and 'contextual features' of the Theo-drama. In response, Vanhoozer proposes a postpropositionalist approach to theology, which employs speech-act theory and the drama metaphor. The postpropositionalist approach does not throw away propositions of the Bible, but along with propositional content, it also gives due importance to the literary forms that constituted the propositions in the Bible. Vanhoozer argues, in the postpropositionalist approach, "both the matter and the form of Scripture are theo-dramatic."[366] That is, both the literary genres and the propositions are deemed authoritative because Scripture is divine communicative action where God is the communication agent, who acts personally in human history and administers his covenant besides just transmitting knowledge.

What does postpropositionalist theology offer? Postpropositionalist theology offers 'polyphonic authorship' of the Bible and 'theological plenitude.' Vanhoozer explains that the communicative action in the Bible is dialogical and not based on a single dominating voice. The dialogue is between God and human beings. This dialogue occurred in different contexts and time periods and was formed in interaction of God with prophets, priests, kings, apostles, disciples, believers, and unbelievers. This signifies the importance of the various communicative activities of God with human beings in the Scripture. Vanhoozer calls this polyphonic authorship. Bakhtin's plural unity influences Vanhoozer's argument for polyphonic authorship.[367] Vanhoozer's approach calls for a theology which is both content-oriented (propositions) and contextually situated (literary genre).

The next step postpropositionalist theology offers is the possibility of diverse theological schemes. The diverse voices in the Bible acknowledge the hope of theological diversity, argues Vanhoozer.[368] Vanhoozer substantiates his argument by specifically pointing out the New Testaments' polyphonic accounts on the life of Jesus Christ presented in the Gospels. Correspondingly, the polyphonic voices of the Gospel writers present enriching multiperspectives of theo-drama. The multiperspectival approach in theology can be seen in Calvin's approach to the doctrine of election. Vanhoozer cites Engel's observation on Calvin's theology of election and presents diverse perspectives on the doctrine of election.[369] Engel states that Calvin in his theology of salvation elucidates election from a 'divine eternal perspective', but he also presents a human temporary

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[365] Vanhoozer, 270–72.

[366] Vanhoozer, 272.

[367] Vanhoozer, 272–74.

[368] Vanhoozer, 274.

[369] Mary Potter Engel, John Calvin's Perspectival Anthropology (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1988), xv,n.12 in Vanhoozer, "On the Very Idea of a Theological System: An Essay in Aid of Triangulating Scripture, Church and World," 179.

perspective where the focus is on the responsibility of the human being in election.[370]

   While polyphonic accounts in the Bible enrich theo-drama, the polyphonic voices in theology also serve the theological fraternity by keeping them from the temptation of falling prey to a single conceptual scheme, proof-texting confessional ideologies, and/or 'making a god of one's interpretation.'[371] In fact, Vanhoozer is sceptical of a single conceptual or theological perspective or system in order to fully articulate the truth.[372] Vanhoozer commends the presence of diverse theological systems such as the Mennonites, Lutherans, Greek Orthodox etcetera, because their presence affirms the possibilities of theology beyond single ideological obsessions.[373] Moreover, confessional theologies such as Reformed, Lutheran, Anabaptist, etc. should not necessarily be seen as "conflictual but as complementary."[374] Vanhoozer's plural perspectives in theology do not validate only diverse Western theological traditions but it also recognizes the theological voices from non-Western theological perspectives (contextual).[375] Further, Vanhoozer argues that a multiperspectival approach to theology, which now includes non-western theological voices, will offer the Western church an opportunity to respond to the allegations of imperialism in setting the theological agenda and forcing scientific methods in hermeneutics.[376] However, Vanhoozer warns that this theological plenitude should not be misconstrued as theological relativism. Theological plenitude has to have parameters to define its boundaries against relativism. Vanhoozer argues, "…it is the scripture principle that sets the critical parameters, this "fence around the gospel.""[377] Since the authoritative Scriptures include diverse voices, canonical diversity itself becomes parameters for theological plenitude.[378] Furthermore, theological plenitude should be based on unity (theo-drama) in diversity (theological voices). In no way should the Scripture be presented as the source of theological conflicts. Vanhoozer argues, "The way forward is to acknowledge a unity in diversity…"[379] Hence, canonical diversity should not be perceived as an obstacle in appropriating theology but a blessing and a pastoral advantage because it allows "Scripture to speak on so many levels to so many different kinds of situations." [380] Vanhoozer summarizes a postpropositionalist approach to theology in this way,

> Postpropositionalist theology insists that there is more to Scripture than revealed propositions, more than separate divine thoughts, more even than a system of divine thoughts. It is in this sense that postpropositionalist theology is *pluralistic.* Yet an

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[370] Vanhoozer, 179.

[371] Vanhoozer, "A Drama-of-Redemption Model," 181.

[372] Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology," 80.

[373] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 274. Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology," 80–81.

[374] Vanhoozer, "On the Very Idea of a Theological System: An Essay in Aid of Triangulating Scripture, Church and World," 181.

[375] Vanhoozer, 180.

[376] Vanhoozer, 131–33, 179–80.

[377] Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology," 81.

[378] Vanhoozer, 81.

[379] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 275.

[380] Vanhoozer, 275.

immediate qualification is in order, for the *post* in *propositionalist* does not mean against but *beyond.* There is *more,* not less, in the canon than propositional revelation.[381]

Having said this, it should be mentioned that Vanhoozer warns against confusing "pluralistic" with "pluralism." He clarifies the difference between pluralistic and pluralism. He explicates,

> The former is a qualifier that acknowledges the diverse voices, forms, and theologies in the Bible; the latter is an ideology that insists that no one voice, form, or theology is better than any other—precisely what a *canonical bounded* apprehension of plurality is designed to rule out![382]

2.5.1.2 *Postconservative approach to theology*

The term "Postconservative" is not an exclusive term used by Vanhoozer alone. It could be seen as a theological movement, propounded by Roger Olson, Jack Rogers,[383] Stanley Grenz, and the like. The following section describes Vanhoozer's postconservative approach to theology. First, if Vanhoozer's postpropositionalist approach was about going beyond the propositional approach in *scientia*, a postconservative approach is about determining the communication of God in Scripture and focusing on the meaning of the text intended by the divine communication-act. The intended meaning in the divine communication-act, thus "recognizes the cognitive significance of literary forms other than assertorical statements."[384] Vanhoozer's postconservative theology perceives revelation to be more than just communication of information or proposition. He does not undermine the propositional aspect of revelation but stresses that the work of revelation is more than revealing information. The divine communication-act is also a personal encounter, and for edifying the relationship between God and humans. It transcends the dichotomies between referring and expressing, between God saying and God doing. Hence, a postconservative approach recognizes the cognitive significance of literary forms other than assertorical. It considers both the content and the forms (literary genres of the Bible) as equally authoritative. It is the literary genres which place propositions within their forms and settings, thus connecting them with historical reality. It does not privilege one particular kind of genre, be it proposition or narrative. The authority of the diverse literary genres brings forth the 'speech-act's illocutionary' element, a communicative discourse that demands response from the church.[385] Berry labels Vanhoozer's postconservative approach as 'Redemptive-Historical speech act.'[386]

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[381] Vanhoozer, 276.

[382] Vanhoozer, footnote 33, 276.

[383] Roger E. Olson, "What Is a Postconservative Evangelical?," October 22, 2018, https://www.patheos.com/blogs/rogereolson/2018/10/what-is-a-postconservative-evangelical/.

[384] Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology," 76. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 278.

[385] C Everett Berry, "Theological vs. Methodological Postconservatism: Stanley Grenz and Kevin Vanhoozer as Test Cases," *Westminster Theological Journal* 69, no. 1 (March 1, 2007): 116., http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0001587898&site=ehost-live.

[386] Berry, 115.

Second, Vanhoozer's postconservative approach employs a "cognitive-poetic" approach to theology, [387] in contrast to cognitive-propositional theology. Vanhoozer does not see the task of theology to reproduce the words and actions of the past literalistically or as a simple replication of the past. Nor does he see the task of theology as ever being finished but rather as a pilgrim journey. In fact, he takes the theology of Hodge and Warfield forward and translates it into contemporary idioms, metaphors, and imaginations. According to Vanhoozer, imagination is a gift from God which is used by the authors of the Bible and hence, theology ought to use it today.[388] The postconservative approach to theology aims at faithful performance, imagination and creative improvisation of the redemptive dramatic script.[389]

Third, postconservative theology perceives the importance of cognitive content to be more than just the communication of information or proposition. Vanhoozer does not undermine the propositional aspect of revelation but stresses that the work of revelation is more than personal encounter and relationship. Revelation is a divine speech act which is transformative. Vanhoozer argues, "The words of the Bible are not simply carriers of information but means of transformation."[390] This is even true for hermeneutical theology as well. He argues, "The end of biblical interpretation is not simply communication – the sharing of information – but communion, a sharing in the light, life, and love of God."[391] Thus, revelation as a divine speech act is transformative.

Fourth, the postconservative approach considers Church tradition as significant in doctrinal reconstruction. However, the role of Church tradition is given within ministerial function and the church remains submissive to the correction of the canon.[392] Also, the truth of Scripture should be sufficient for the 'life and language' of the church.[393] Without pinpointing an individual or a group, Vanhoozer observes that several evangelical theologians have rejected propositional theology and have found an answer in the life and language of the Christian community instead of the authoritative text. The postliberals validate the alternative offer.

Fifth, the postconservative theology "aspire[s] not to absolute but to adequate knowledge."[394] Vanhoozer does not deny the fact that humans can have adequate knowledge of God but comprehending God completely is beyond the capacity of any human being. The adequacy of the text and the testimony of the Bible's authors are adequate for true Christian faith and for participation in theo-drama.[395]

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[387] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 278.

[388] Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 37.

[389] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 279, 311.

[390] Vanhoozer, 70.

[391] Kevin J Vanhoozer, *Hearers and Doers: A Pastor's Guide to Making Disciples through Scripture and Doctrine* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), Theological core exercises for the yound and old.

[392] Roger E. Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming: A Postconservative Approach to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), Postconservative style of evangelical theology. eBook format.

[393] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 278.

[394] Vanhoozer, 288.

[395] Vanhoozer, 288.

2.5.1.3 Postfoundationalist approach to theology

What is the foundationalism approach to theology and what are its defects? Foundationalism is an epistemology which asserts that truths have to be based upon prior indubitable foundational beliefs. The foundation could be reason, senses, or the propositions abstracted from the Bible. Several theologians, likewise, consider information mined from the Bible as indubitable beliefs on which theology is built "via induction and deduction from their biblical base."[396] More pointedly, for foundationalism "Scripture is an indubitable foundation."[397]

Does that mean that the canon is not a foundation for the postfoundationalist? Vanhoozer argues otherwise. He says, "The canon is a foundation, but not the type that characterizes classical foundationalism."[398] He points out two defects in the classical foundationalism approach to theology. He first demurs foundationalism which abstracts propositions from the Bible without taking into account the diverse literary genres through which the information is canonically communicated. Second, the procedure of abstracting information from the Bible does not inform or communicate to the church or the knower, the 'purposes and particulars–the particular kind of texts, the particular location, and the identity of the exegete.'[399] In addition, Vanhoozer mentions that in modernity, 'autonomous reason,' was employed for "objective" exegesis as the indubitable foundational belief, whereas, in postmodernity, it was focussed on the community's interest and situatedness.[400] The Postfoundationalist approach to theology neither considers 'propositional truths that serve as foundations for knowledge' nor accepts church community or any community's belief as their foundation. Instead, it seeks to "hold onto the ideals of truth, objectivity, and rationality, while at the same time acknowledges the provisional, contextual, and fallible nature of human reason."[401]

Vanhoozer substantiates his argument by employing the metaphors of an atlas and maps. He relates the metaphor of an atlas with the canon, and maps as knowledge or interpretive frameworks. Knowledge or interpretive frameworks are like following maps which entail its dependency on the canonical atlas and reality.[402] Maps represent objective reality but with subjective selections. This signifies a postfoundationalist's determination for objective truth but with contextual and subjective human reason. More so, just as maps cannot be 'universal or all-purpose maps', so it is with interpretive frameworks. There are diverse maps (road maps, political maps, topographic maps) which reflect a particular framework, intent and context, and so it is with interpretive

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[396] Vanhoozer, 292.
[397] Vanhoozer, 292.
[398] Vanhoozer, 292.
[399] Vanhoozer, 293.
[400] Vanhoozer, 293.
[401] F. LeRon Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology: Wolfhart Pannenberg and the New Theological Rationality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 58; in Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 293.
[402] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 294–95.

frameworks. Both atlas and maps, like script and doctrine, provide direction. If the canonical atlas works as a script for speaking and acting, maps are for walking and following, argues Vanhoozer.[403] The same metaphor can be employed to perceive a similar connection between the canon (atlas) and diverse biblical genres (maps). However, Vanhoozer sets a few conditions. He asserts that these metaphors (the canon as an atlas, and genres or interpretative framework as maps) should have internal '*coherence*' (within the text and maps), '*correspond*' with other texts or genres and maps (topographical maps, road maps) and '*coordinate*' with other maps and texts. For example, diverse biblical maps coordinate together to a common orientation, Jesus Christ.[404]

Furthermore, Vanhoozer asserts that the canon is the foundation, but not by falling prey to the foundationalist epistemology. On the contrary, he proposes a three-stranded theo-dramatic epistemology for a postfoundationalist approach to theology.[405] The first is 'creation: right cognitive functioning', where God created human beings to believe or trust information without analyzing, unless there are sufficient reasons not to do so.[406] The second strand of theo-dramatic epistemology is the 'fall: distorted cognitive functioning'. The fall or sin, which is universal, has fully depraved this cognitive function of human beings and therefore is in conflict with the original design plan. This signifies the limitation of both modernity's child, 'individual autonomous reasoning,' and postmodernity's community interpretation. Hence, any knowledge, belief, or interpretive framework, argues Vanhoozer, should undergo a 'critical test'. He proposes two tests, the canon test (Scripture) and the catholic test (church tradition).[407] The argument for undergoing a critical test is based on fallibilism rationality, which states that any reasoning should offer their 'thinking to critical testing'.[408]

The third strand is 'redemption: restored cognitive function'. Vanhoozer also calls this 'virtue epistemology'. In theo-dramatic epistemology, more than correct procedure or technique, it is interpretive virtue which should be sought to gain knowledge. Vanhoozer further exemplifies this. He asserts that submitting one's thinking to a critical test is a sign of humility, which signifies that a person is willing to transform or redeem his thinking through critical testing. Also, the acceptance that one's interpretive framework is limited and biased signifies one's willing honesty.[409] Virtue epistemology is inculcated only through the transforming grace of Jesus Christ.[410]

Up until this point, Vanhoozer has been arguing about how a theologian can determine what Scripture is saying. This of course includes intellectual exercise but it is not limited to academic exegesis to gain knowledge. As a matter of fact,

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[403] Vanhoozer, 295.

[404] Vanhoozer, 298–99.

[405] Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology," 86–89.

[406] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, This view is also called Reliabilism, which is based on Plantinga's neo–Reformed epistemology and Reids' views on reliabilism, 302.

[407] Vanhoozer, 302–3.

[408] Vanhoozer, 303.

[409] Vanhoozer, 304.

[410] Vanhoozer, 303.

Theo-drama's canonical-linguistic approach is incomplete without the *Sapientia* aspect of theology, because '*scientia* ultimately serves sapiential purpose'.[411] *Sapientia,* the second triad of the six-fold path of canonical-linguistic approach will be discussed in the following section.

2.5.2   Towards the Sapientia approach: performing theo-drama in contemporary contexts

As the current rubric suggests, and on the basis of Vanhoozer's description of theo-drama, it will not be premature to assert that Theo-drama is not limited to provide knowledge about Jesus Christ but instead it teaches us to perform, and live in our contemporary contexts. Our efforts in performing the theo-drama are all the more challenging when our contemporary situations are quite different from the biblical times. If the contemporary contexts are different from the biblical times, does that mean that our performance of the gospel has no value? Does that allow us to 'correlate' with contemporary forms and practices to address the contextual concerns? Vanhoozer vehemently argues against it. He argues, "The canon is the Church's supreme criterion and condition for performances that are both "bound" and "free.""[412] Vanhoozer argues for 'bound fidelity' to the Scripture and 'creative freedom' to the performance of the gospel. Since we are living in the last few unscripted scenes of Act 4,[413] according to Vanhoozer's Theo-dramatic scheme, it makes our creative performance an all the more daunting task. Accordingly, Vanhoozer proposes a sapiential approach to theology which focuses on practical wisdom and creative freedom in performing theo-drama while maintaining Scriptural fidelity. He does so by proposing a sapiential approach using a second triad: prosaic, phronetic and prophetic.

Before describing this second triad, it is worth mentioning Vanhoozer's observations of a few patterns of theology which have sought to address contextual concerns, but have lost Scriptural fidelity. They correlated with the contemporary agenda in the name of creative freedom. Vanhoozer refers to contextual theology as "Glocal" theology, a theology which interconnects global theological flows and local concerns and vice versa. However, Vanhoozer identifies several approaches for glocal theologies which are unscriptural, having correlated with contemporary methods and agenda in the name of contextualization. First, there are the theologies which see the gospel as supracultural. Glocalization is then only used to tactfully communicate it, while overlooking the significance of local culture and context as it contextualises. Vanhoozer cites Bediako's criticism of Kato, who rejects the use of local culture of any kind to contribute to African theology.[414] The second is religious globalization. In religious globalization every religion is seen simply as an expression of the same spiritual reality contributing towards peace and justice. This method, asserts Vanhoozer, is employed by Reat and Parry's *A World of Theology* which aims at religious globalization, Lindbeck's 'experiential-

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[411] Vanhoozer, 256.
[412] Vanhoozer, 253.
[413] Vanhoozer, "A Drama-of-Redemption Model," 174.
[414] Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All," 100.

expressive' approach to theology, and Smart and Konstantine's *Christian Systematic Theology in a World Context* which sees all religions, including Christianity as secular worldviews.[415] The third unscriptural contextualization is theological ethnification which aims at recovering cultural identities that eventually become ethnocentric.[416] Vanhoozer points towards several third world theologies such as "aboriginal, African, African-American, American Indian, Asian, Asian American, and so on, as examples of theological ethnifcation. The fourth is theologies that employ cultural relativism. An approach, which overtly focuses on the gap between the Bible and the contemporary contexts so that there are no possibilities left to connect the Bible with the present context.[417] The fifth is cultural determinism, a postmodern agenda which perceives theology as a part and function of social, cultural and political structure.[418] The sixth is cultural colonialism practiced by missionaries (the actions of western missionaries are usually highlighted) who confuse preaching the gospel with imposing their cultural understanding of the gospel on their audience.[419] The seventh is the approach which draws only propositions from the Bible (propositionalist theology) to address contextual concerns.[420] Most models mentioned here give lived experience a priority over the Bible. Vanhoozer does agree that lived experience has a legitimate part in theology. However, it is a secondary source, along with Church tradition. The Bible (the theo-dramatic Script) remains the primary source.[421]

Having discussed the problematic forms and patterns of glocal and contextual theology, Vanhoozer now proposes the sapiential approach to theology which emphasizes the church's appropriation and performance of the theo-drama in a contemporary context. As aforementioned, a sapiential approach to theology is aimed at practical wisdom and creative freedom for contextual theology. It is achieved through prosaic, phronetic and prophetic theology.

2.5.2.1 A prosaic approach to theology

What is the prosaic approach to theology? Prosaic means our daily activities in everyday life. A prosaic approach to theology means referring to Scripture for practical wisdom.[422] Vanhoozer argues that although Scripture does not provide a detailed guide for daily activities, Scripture is sufficient in providing practical wisdom and indicating "what shape a good life" can take.[423] How does Scripture provide practical wisdom for the daily life? Vanhoozer elucidates,

> …[by] recognizing the importance of "prosaic": the practices of ordinary language and of ordinary life. However, instead of seeking to perfect the ordinary language of the biblical

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[415] Vanhoozer, 101.
[416] Vanhoozer, 100–108.
[417] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 311.
[418] Vanhoozer, 312.
[419] Vanhoozer, 313.
[420] Vanhoozer, 315–17.
[421] Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All," 106.
[422] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 309, 310.
[423] Vanhoozer, 309.

> prose by recasting Scripture into the form of a conceptual system, a prosaic theology seeks to learn the habits of seeing, thinking, tasting, inherent in the diverse literary forms of Scripture and to continue them in equally ordinary forms of life. For it is precisely our everyday patterns of life that form habits. Habits, in turn, form character; and character, as we know, is plot.[424]

A prosaic approach to theology is built upon the postpropositionalist and postconservative approaches of reading the Scripture which demonstrate how God communicated through diverse literary genres and different contexts so that a theologian can nurture the church towards contextualising theo-drama in everyday life. Thus, the challenge for the theologian as dramaturge is contextualization. More specifically, the challenge is "… to move from the prose of Scripture to the prose of contemporary culture."[425] The prosaic approach to theology, through literary genres, bridges the gap between the biblical situation and our daily realities. Vanhoozer observes that in the history of missions various terms or concepts were used to refer to the practice of bridging the gap between biblical realities and contemporary situations. These terms are translation, application, contextualization, and acculturation.[426] Since the theo-drama is transcultural, it entails contextualization. This is the first principle of prosaic theology. The transcultural nature of the diverse genres in Scripture, thus affirms its 'transcultural significance' in contemporary situations which is the second principle of prosaic theology.[427] Furthermore, the transcultural nature of Scripture and theo-drama, can be clearly seen in God's communication with different characters in the Bible. The transcultural nature of Scripture is inherent in literary genres rather than just abstracted principles and commandments.[428] Therefore, prosaic theology defines contextualization: "*A genuine contextual theology* [which] *is accountable both to the theo-drama (and hence to the canonical texts) and to the contemporary situation (and hence to particular cultural contexts)."*[429]

If the diverse literary genres of the transcultural Scripture can nurture our practical reasoning, how and what does a theologian translate into the prose of everyday life? Vanhoozer asserts that the translation of theo-drama into everyday life is the joint task of the Word and the Spirit. However, it is the Spirit who plays an integral role in translating the Word in everyday situations and especially in the church. He gives a few specific examples to substantiate his argument. In Acts 2 he observes that it was the work of the Holy Spirit which led people to speak the gospel in their own language. In Acts 15, it was the Spirit which led the Jerusalem Council to decide for the Gentile believers to nullify the Jewish religious obligation of circumcision in order to be saved. Contextualization, therefore, is not about following specific rules of translation but instead offering oneself to be guided by the Holy Spirit. It is not about preserving the local culture but instead about 'localizing the gospel in new contexts', argues Vanhoozer.[430] So, how does the Spirit guide in contextualization? Vanhoozer gives an example of the role of the Spirit in Bible translation into regional languages. In the translation of the

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[424] Vanhoozer, 310.
[425] Vanhoozer, 310.
[426] Vanhoozer, 310.
[427] Vanhoozer, 314.
[428] Vanhoozer, 314.
[429] Vanhoozer, 314.
[430] Vanhoozer, 318–19.

Bible, the importance of local expressions of words (prosaic): prose of daily life should be acknowledged. For example, *Logos* and *Kyrios,* two Greek words, were used as religious terms, having been borrowed by biblical authors from Greek culture and 'sanctified' for use in Christian service.[431] Therefore, the challenge in the present context is to translate other biblical terms into regional languages. Yet, the translation has to be in communication with both Scripture and church tradition. Vanhoozer calls Scripture, a canonical principle, and church tradition, a catholic principle. He states, "the supreme authority for any version of Christianity is Scripture, the divinely commissioned testimony to what God was doing in Jesus Christ" – a clear articulation of the canonical principle.[432] Vanhoozer further demonstrates how to maintain fidelity to the Scripture principle in translation. He invokes Calvin and Steiner to support his argument. Alluding to Calvin's *Institutes,* 1.13.3, Vanhoozer argues that in our contemporary situations, extrabiblical technical terms or concepts should be used for translation; however, these technical words and concepts should not add anything to the scripture but 'render what is implicit *explicit,*'[433] and the translation should not go beyond the 'Christological trajectory'[434]. Similarly, Vanhoozer invokes Steiner's proposal for maintaining fidelity in translation, which is neither by duplicating the text nor by word-to-word translation (like an interlinear translation), but by restoring the meaning of the text in a given context.[435] Moreover, the goal of the translator should not be 'formal equivalence: word-to word correspondence' or 'a matter of matching locutions' but 'dynamic equivalence: sameness of effect', or 'equivalent illocutions' which considers both the proposition and the speech act in translation in a given context.[436]

Vanhoozer explains the next principle for translation, the catholic principle as, "The spirit-led tradition of the church extended in space and time."[437] It should be noted that church traditions consist of both the primacy of the Word and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Vanhoozer refers to the Council of Chalcedon as an example, which, led by the Spirit, contextualized the doctrine of the Trinity in terms of *homoousion*, which went beyond, but not against Philippians 2, in describing Jesus' two natures in one person.[438] Vanhoozer further clarifies that the significance of the catholic principle for translation is not in repeating words which the Church has already used in the past, but by nurturing ourselves with the kind of judgment, or practical wisdom the Church demonstrated, especially in

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[431] Vanhoozer, 321.

[432] Vanhoozer, 322.

[433] Kevin J Vanhoozer, "Into the Great 'Beyond': A Theologian's Response to the Marshall Plan," in *Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology*, by I. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids, MI./Milton Keynes, Bucks, UK: Baker Academic ; Paternoster, 2004), 89.

[434] Vanhoozer, 91.

[435] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 388, 390 A summary of Steiner's four steps for translation: 1] Translation trust that there is meaning in the text to be understood. 2) Therefore hunt the meaning of the text. 3] Import both form and content in a given context. 4) Restitution of the text.

[436] Vanhoozer, 387, 388.

[437] Vanhoozer, "A Drama-of-Redemption Model," 181.

[438] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Christology in the West: Conversation in Europe and North America," in *Jesus Without Borders: Christology in the Majority World*, ed. Gene L. Green, Stephen T. Pardue, and K. K. Yeo (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2014), ?

Chalcedon.[439] Thus, the Spirit uses both principles: Scripture and Church tradition, in nurturing practical wisdom, in judging what is compatible in our culture, while moving from the Bible to everyday life.[440] Vanhoozer warns that the prosaic approach to theology is not about export-import activities but about the contextualization of the gospel.

2.5.2.2 *A phronetic approach to theology*

As mentioned before, under the rubric 'Hermeneutical and contextual challenges' Vanhoozer expresses his disappointment with the medieval and modern approaches to theology in the West. His phronetic approach to theology is a response to the shortfalls he sees in them. Accordingly, in Vanhoozer's observation, both medieval and modern approaches to biblical studies were either 'theoretical knowledge' or 'technical skills'. Vanhoozer describes these eras as two pictures of rationality which have detained biblical studies.[441] A phronetic approach to theology is the third option, proposes Vanhoozer. Phronesis is a term used by Aristotle for 'moral reasoning in concrete situations.'[442] Several terms such as practical reason, good judgment and prudence are used by Vanhoozer to explain phronesis. These terms convey the "ability to exercise good judgment in specific contexts."[443] Vanhoozer admits to borrowing this term from Aristotle and Gadamer. Aristotle used the term phronesis in the context of moral reason, whereas, Gadamer used it as an ethical principle. Vanhoozer claims that he uses this term with 'certain adjustments' and 'transformation'.[444] However, phronesis, be it in the approach of Aristotle, Gadamer or Vanhoozer himself, always remains as the ability to judge what to say or do in a specific context.[445] Thus, phronesis is not a technique, method, theory, conviction, or belief but a character, quality,

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[439] Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding*, 201.

[440] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 322.

[441] Vanhoozer, 325.

[442] Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology," 81.

[443] Vanhoozer, 81 For Aristotle, Phronesis "is the capacity to respond at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right aim, and in the right way?" Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics, 1106b21-23 in Kevin Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, 333.

[444] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 326.

[445] Vanhoozer, 326–30 A brief description of how Vanhoozer makes certain adjustments in phronetic approach to theology is in order. This will, in fact, display Vanhoozer's ability to judge and incorporate a term for theological use. First, if phronesis for Aristotle was "… a reasoned… capacity to act with regard to human good," in Vanhoozer's proposal it is that, "… an action is good only if it agrees with the theodrama." Second, Vanhoozer transforms Gadamer's notion of deliberative conversation in phronesis, where neither authors nor the readers is in control of understanding but understanding itself. Thus, phronesis for Gadamer is achieving "effective historical consciousness". Vanhoozer argues that it is not understanding itself or history but a rather the Triune play of theodrama which drives the process of understanding. Thus, phronesis is more than achieving effective historical consciousness; it is "effective Pneumatic consciousness", where the Spirit makes effective the church's interpretation. Third, Gadamer considers understanding to be a gradual continuous play within a given context. Vanhoozer observes that Gadamer gives importance to the interpretive community where the ultimate conversation occurs. For Vanhoozer, the ultimate authority is not the interpretive community but canon alone. .

virtue, or practical wisdom, aimed at doing what is best.[446] Some moral, intellectual and theological qualities Vanhoozer mentions are honesty, carefulness, humility, faith, hope, love, perception and perspective. Vanhoozer emphasizes perception and perspective as significant interpretive virtues which guide contextualization to act appropriately in any given situation (perception), keeping the larger theo-dramatic plot in consideration (perspective). The virtue of phronesis is inculcated and nurtured by the Scripture.[447] Having defined phronesis, the following section will describe what a theologian or church does with phronesis.

If *scientia* was about determining what God has said in the Scripture, *Sapientia* is about performing theo-drama in a contemporary context. As such, performing theo-drama entails performing the script in a new situation. How does one perform a script in new situations taking phronesis into consideration? Vanhoozer admits that the 'performing a script' metaphor does not give comprehensive directions to communicate fittingly in every given context. He, accordingly, proposes that improvisation is a more precise term for contextualization.[448] It is doctrine, argues Vanhoozer, which cultivates the ability to improvise.[449] Before explaining improvisation, Vanhoozer first clarifies a few misconceptions about improvisation. He observes that improvisation is often understood as unscripted, clever, without preparation, and extempore activity. Precisely due to these misconceptions and thus the fear of falling prey to a heresy, improvisation has not been pursued in contextualization.[450] But Vanhoozer defines improvisation as an activity which "requires both training (formation) and discernment (imagination)."[451] It is a phronetic approach, which suggests that it is not a technique as such but a kind of virtue based on theo-dramatic formation.[452] In contextualization, theo-dramatic improvisation is like disciplined contextualization,[453] or like a type of Hiebert's "critical contextualization."[454] Vanhoozer borrows the metaphor of improvisation from Aristotle and Henry James' *theatrical improvisation*. He often uses theatrical and musical contexts to explain improvisation. While integrating improvisation to the phronetic approach in theology, Vanhoozer argues for theo-dramatic improvisation or disciplined contextualization.

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[446] Vanhoozer, 332.

[447] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Theological Education and the Church: The School of Theodrama," *International Theological Education for the 21st Century*, n.d., part three, http://www.wardconsultation.org/Chicago%2004/Vanhoozer.pdf.

[448] Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All," 113.

[449] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 335.

[450] Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All," 113; Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 336.

[451] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 337.

[452] Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All," 114.

[453] Vanhoozer, 114.

[454] Vanhoozer, 114 Critical contextualization follows four significant elements. 1. Bible as the primary standard for rule of faith and life. 2. It acknowledges the work of the Holy Spirit. 3. It recognizes the role of the Church (the interpretive community), not just in developing contextual theology but also to check against syncretism. 4. It is against monocultural perspective but strives for metacultural and metatheolgical frameworks. Paul Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 11, no. 3 (July): 109–11.

Accordingly, he mentions four characteristics, mostly within theatrical contexts, that make improvisation genuine. These four characteristics are spontaneity, accepting and blocking offers, narrative skills, and reincorporation. The first element is spontaneity. Spontaneity tests the actor's or the contextualizer's preparedness to respond to a given situation in a fitting manner. Improvisation neither demands 'planning,' nor 'ad-libing or trying to be original', but long years of training, discipline in mastering the Scripture and yet not limiting oneself to just reproduce the original form. Along with years of discipline, the theo-dramatic improviser also has the assistance of the Holy Spirit, who guides in his own miraculous ways.[455] Vanhoozer states the example of Paul in Philippians 2:6-11, where he improvises by using the name of YHWH for Jesus as "Lord" in verses 10-11.

The second is accepting or blocking an offer built upon an initial premise. To accept an offer is to maintain and continue with the initial premise and blocking an offer is to reject the initial premise and use one's own idea.[456] So in theo-dramatic improvisation, Christians are disciplined to identify with theo-drama as their prime premise. Vanhoozer points to Athanasius who improvised the nature of Christ as *homoousios* after an accepted offer of the initial premise of the council of Nicaea's equality with God. On the contrary, Arius blocked the initial premise of Nicaea and used his own idea which rejected Jesus' equality with God.[457] Vanhoozer also states that several times the Israelites too blocked the offer and faced the consequences.

The third feature is narrative skill. After accepting the offer to continue with the initial premise (Theo-drama), the improviser then narrates the story from memory. The recitation or reproduction has to be based on the offer of the initial premise, and not a random narration.

The fourth is reincorporation. In the narration of the story, the improviser reincorporates a "previously revealed bit of information or situation within a scene."[458] Vanhoozer points to the way Paul accepted offers of several attributes of God from Isaiah 40-55 in Philippians. 2:6-11 and reincorporated them to Jesus.[459] Vanhoozer provides another example of theo-dramatic improvisation from the Bible. The greatest example is Jesus himself, whose sacrifice was an improvisation of sacrifices in the Old Testament. More pointedly, elucidates Vanhoozer,

> The cross, like all good improvisation, reincorporates the earlier action: Adam; the exodus; bloody sacrifices and sin offerings; the exile; the Passover supper; the office of prophet, priest and king; the destruction of the temple—all are taken up, "recapitulated," in Jesus' death.[460]

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[455] Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding*, 191–92; Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 337–38.

[456] Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding*, 193.

[457] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 343.

[458] Vanhoozer, 339.

[459] Vanhoozer, 342.

[460] Vanhoozer, 388.

Along with the examples from the Bible, Vanhoozer also refers to the history of Christian mission and theology as a history of theo-dramatic improvisation. Vanhoozer warns that in improvisation, an actor/theologian/pastor/Christian, does not stay faithful to the theo-drama like a slave, but improvises theo-drama. In improvisation, theo-drama may change according to a new situation. However, the change will not be "in its inner essence but only in its exterior appearance." For example, a professor relates to his students and colleagues in a different manner, but he remains the same person. More pointedly, a teacher has different characters, according to the situation (relationships), but identity is singular (*ipse* identity).[461] Further, narration and reincorporation anticipate creativity and not simply duplications or the production of doctrinal replicas. Creativity is "a matter of understanding things in new contexts."[462] Vanhoozer invokes Bhaktin's argument to support his definition of creativity. He, however, warns that creativity is neither creating independently (creation *ex nihilo)* nor being innovative, but drawing from the resources available (canonical script) for the present context. It is a significant element of improvisation.

2.5.2.3 *Prophetic approach to theology*

A prophetic approach to theology plays the role of a prophet, like in the Old Testament. Whenever the church dwindles from theo-drama in addressing contextual concerns, prophetic theology acts on behalf of God. Prophetic theology functions similarly to the way prophets confront and remind the church about the privileges and responsibilities of theo-drama. Prophetic theology focuses on God's perspective on things, reinforcing God's covenantal promises, and the importance of our keeping God's word.[463] It does not predict the future of theology but it confronts and guides the church in performing the Scripture in a given situation. It alerts the church if biblical themes are appropriated within the broader theo-drama in a given context. Vanhoozer argues that the prophetic principle goes hand in hand with the Scripture principle in situations like syncretism, and when the temptation is towards correlation with the cultural agenda. He argues,

> … the "Spirit's speaking in the Scriptures" provides the indispensable critical leverage for theology's prophetic task of calling the church's speech and action back to conformity with its conventional constitution. Specially, the prophetic ministry of theology involves testing patterns of speech and action to see whether they conform to those canonical practices that body forth the Christ of the Scriptures. [464]

Vanhoozer further argues that prophetic theology considers the context as genuine, but not as having supreme authority, because a true contextual theology always gives the gospel its supreme rightful place. Along with confrontation, prophetic theology also reminds the church 'to practice what we preach', and prepares the church for eschaton, exhibiting the future kingdom of God here and

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[461] Vanhoozer, 350; Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 390–91 it is not a idem identity (numerical identity) but ipse identity (self-constancy).

[462] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 352.

[463] Vanhoozer, 355.

[464] Vanhoozer, 356.

now. More importantly, prophetic theology "enable[s] the disciple in each and every situation to *discern and to do Christ*, the practical wisdom of God."[465]

2.5.3 Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology and the role of the Church in addressing contextual theology

In the current subsection, the goal is to briefly describe the hermeneutical role of the church in relation to the Word of God (scientia) and the practical wisdom led by the Spirit (sapientia) in contextual theology. If the theologian serves the church through *scientia* and *sapientia,* the church's responsibility is to nurture theologians.[466] At the outset, it should be mentioned that Vanhoozer has consistently argued that in developing theology in a contemporary context, both "Scripture and the church are equally necessary, however, not equally authoritative".[467] He puts it bluntly, "Biblical script without ecclesial performance is empty; ecclesial performance without biblical script is blind."[468] This implies that Vanhoozer designates primary authority only to Scripture, and the church draws her authority from the Triune God, who communicates in and through the Scripture. This view was described previously under the rubric *Sola Scriptura*.

If the canon is a divine and human discourse, the hermeneutical role of the church is to 'acknowledge' the divine/human discourse in the canon (not just the propositions from the Bible but also the other forms), and 'respond' accordingly to the contemporary situation in a fitting manner.[469] If the church acknowledges the normativity of the Scripture, it entails that the Church and its interpretations should be answerable to the Scripture.[470] Vanhoozer warns against the temptation that, in its theological formulation, the church would boast of the work of the Holy Spirit through her, independent of the Scriptures. He clarifies, the Holy Spirit works within the 'broader theo-dramatic context': both within the canon and the church.[471] He further argues, just as the Spirit worked consistently in producing the Bible within canonical triangulation: the mighty act of God in Jesus Christ, communication action of God with human authors, and the work of the Holy Spirit in prompting human authors; similarly, the work of the Holy Spirit should be consistently applied in the interpretive community, the '*ecclesial* triangulation.' The *Ecclesial triangulation* is, the work of God in Jesus, inspired biblical discourse, and the word-and-Spirit led beliefs and practices of the church in a contemporary reality.[472] This implies that canonical triangulation corresponds to ecclesial triangulation, where both the scripture and the church are significant factors in the broader context of Theo-drama, led by the ministry of the Holy

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[465] Vanhoozer, 359.

[466] Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology," 104.

[467] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 362.

[468] Vanhoozer, 362.

[469] Vanhoozer, 180.

[470] Vanhoozer, 184.

[471] Vanhoozer, 188.

[472] Vanhoozer, "On the Very Idea of a Theological System: An Essay in Aid of Triangulating Scripture, Church and World," 172–174.

Spirit. However, it is the Scripture which stays authoritative and the interpretation of the church that can be repealed or revised.[473]

Therefore, while maintaining ecclesial triangulation, how should the church function in a given context while maintaining the authority of Scripture? Vanhoozer argues that the hermeneutical role of the church is not to produce a replica of theo-drama, but rather to improvise. Otherwise, the church will become a "Deadly theatre".[474] The work of the church in a contemporary context, is not even recapturing the origins of theo-drama in rituals without knowing its importance and credibility. Otherwise, the church will become a "Holy theatre."[475] Further, the role of the church is not to assist believers to feel good or alive by self-sacrifice. The Church, however, should be a "Celebratory or Sacramental theatre," which celebrates the redemption and the presence of Christ in a contemporary situation through Word and sacrament.[476] Needless to say, Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology perceives the role of the church within theatrical metaphor.

Having said that, the question arises if there should be a guide to a fitting celebration of theo-drama. Additionally, which church tradition, doctrine and/or theatre is reliable? Where and when does the church deal with contextual concerns while celebrating theo-drama? Vanhoozer argues that the church requires a guide that can instruct it in doctrinal and contextual matters. Accordingly, he argues that along with the authoritative script, God has provided a plethora of resources: the work of the Holy Spirit in the entire history of the church and its traditions. This is a more than competent guide to improvise the Theo-drama.[477] Hence, to learn how to perform Theo-drama in any given context, the church does not have to start from nothing, but from the prior performance of the church: the church's traditions.[478] Moreover, the resources of church tradition should not be considered a threat to the script, but rather an assistance in performing the script.[479] Vanhoozer divides the resources of church tradition into different productions, theatres or levels, namely the masterpiece theatre (ecumenical council: creeds), the regional theatre (denominations: confessions) and the local theatre (local congregation: contextualized performance). While dividing the resources of the church, Vanhoozer designates the theatre/church into levels where contextual concerns should be addressed. These contextual concerns are addressed only by corresponding with other theatres/churches and not independently. Vanhoozer proposes this scheme with a warning. He cautions, "No confessions, traditions, or denominations exhaust or expresses everything that is in Christ."[480] The aim of this proposal, argues Vanhoozer, is not to give theoretical

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[473] Vanhoozer, 172.

[474] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 403.

[475] Vanhoozer, 404–5.

[476] Vanhoozer, "Theological Education and the Church: The School of Theodrama," Part Two; Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 403–7; Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology," 101–3.

[477] Vanhoozer, "A Drama-of-Redemption Model," 175.

[478] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 449.

[479] Vanhoozer, 446.

[480] Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding*, 149.

formulae, or to use this theatrical model magisterially, but as a possible way out: a concrete direction to address contextual theology within catholicity.[481]

The first level is Masterpiece theatre: creedal theology. What is a creed? Vanhoozer defines a creed as the following,

> A creed is an abbreviated, authorized, and adequate summary of both the biblical witness and the preaching and teaching of the universal church. As such, a creed is a "guide to correct reading of Scripture and an adequate expression of belief and identity."[482]

The creeds, the officially accepted beliefs and their products, and orthodox doctrine dealt with the universal questions related to the identity of the Triune God and the gospel. These creeds are associated with the seven ecumenical councils of the ancient church. The ecumenical councils of the ancient church compiled the formally accepted beliefs as 'a confession of the whole church' with an aim to bring together all the churches as a universal catholic church.[483] The purpose of creedal theology is twofold. First, it is to relate the Catholic Church to the local church, and also to provide Catholic directions to local theologies by showing how the church fittingly used and performed the Scripture in mission history.[484] Due to the universal nature of creedal theology, contextual theology is obligated to know and interact with creedal theology.[485]

The second level is regional theatre: confessional theology. Why confessional theology? Vanhoozer argues that since the Roman Catholic and the Protestant councils during the Reformation could not come to a common agreement to address their theological queries, they followed their national or regional titles giving rise to confessional theology.[486] Vanhoozer is aware of the divisive nature of several confessional theologies. However, he sees this approach, within regional theatre, as a necessary one in doing theology. Since confessions and denominations have a historical background, and were borne out of specific theological issues, they provide a unique resource for doing contextual theology.[487] Diverse confessional theologies within regional theatre correspond with Vanhoozer's proposal of theological plenitude, where diverse confessional theologies enrich the theo-drama, without any conflict.

The third level is local theatre: congregational theology. Local theatre: congregational theology addresses everyday concerns of the congregation, a contextualized performance of the Catholic Church. Local theology, while being sensitive to their contextual concerns, should also strive to relate adequately to regional theatre (who addressed their theological quests within their historical context) and Creedal or Catholic fidelity (who stay faithful to the biblical script.)[488] Vanhoozer argues that it is the responsibility of a pastor to educate the

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[481] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 448.Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding*, "Theatre" of the Gospel: definitions and distinctions, eBook format.
[482] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 449.
[483] Vanhoozer, 450.
[484] Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding*, 148.Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 450.
[485] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 450.
[486] Vanhoozer, 452.
[487] Vanhoozer, 453.
[488] Vanhoozer, 456.

local congregation, teach and remind them about their role as part of the Universal Catholic church.[489] If the pastor neglects to convey the importance of creedal and confessional theology to his congregation, he is alienating them from the gifts of the Spirit given to the universal church in the past, and depriving them of the bounteous work of the Holy Spirit in church history.[490] Vanhoozer further argues that the relation of the local church with the creedal and confessional church will guide all of them, not only to prioritize central and marginal doctrinal matters, but it will also advance awareness of issues, and control fruitless repetition in theology.[491] Vanhoozer perceives this process of contextual theology within local theatre, both as 'enriching and being enriched' in theo-dramatic understanding.[492] Vanhoozer reiterates that in doing contextual theology it should always be remembered that though the contextual settings change, the theo-dramatic script remains the same. Therefore, contextual theology must look to, and interact with, the other levels of creedal and confessional theology in order to perform theo-drama. Vanhoozer mentions that local theology has the potential to be creedal theology, only to the level, that it faithfully lives and fittingly performs the drama of redemption.[493]

2.6 A Critical Evaluation of Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology

2.6.1 Introduction

Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology is a bold theological combination of academic sophistication and everyday challenges, of Reformed theology and contemporary context. Although the Vanhoozerian corpus is intellectually sophisticated, it is nevertheless adventurous and relevant because it navigates the labyrinth of contemporary contextual concerns, both in the northern and southern hemispheres. Vanhoozer stays true to his description of a Theologian: Missionary-Explorer. He has courageously explored a wide spectrum of conceptual resources, theological treasures, theatrical minerals, non-western theological reserves, the territory of philosophers and theologians from diverse faiths and ideologies, literary wealth across the borders, cultural riches from the west and beyond, and at the same time, has integrated them with Christian theology, without compromising the authority of Scripture. This integration of a plethora of resources into Christian theology is accomplished by maintaining canonical sense, while being sensitive to catholic tradition and contextual concerns. More specifically, in regard to the purpose of this research, Vanhoozer has endeavored to expand the Reformed Theology of Scripture in a dramatized manner. The present section aims to evaluate Vanhoozer's hermeneutical Theology. To reiterate, the objective of this chapter is to explore the question: In what way does Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theory address hermeneutical and contextual challenges and to what extent does he succeed in continuing the tradition of a Reformed view of Scripture? For the purpose of this chapter and over all research, the evaluation of the Hermeneutical theology of Vanhoozer will be confined to

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[489] Vanhoozer, 453.
[490] Vanhoozer, 454–55.
[491] Vanhoozer, 455.
[492] Vanhoozer, 455.
[493] Vanhoozer, 456.

two inquiries. In order to stand the test, Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology has to adequately fit the tradition of the Reformed doctrine of Scripture, and be able to guide Christians in sufficiently interacting with a multi-religious context including the challenge of hidden power-structures. Furthermore, the hermeneutical theology of Vanhoozer will be tested particularly within the context of Reformed ecclesial tradition in India, i.e., the Reformed Presbyterian Church of India (RPCI), which the researcher adheres to.

2.6.2   Critical appraisal of Vanhoozer expanding the Reformed theology of Scripture

Our first criterion for testing Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology is: Does Vanhoozer's reframed theology of Scripture adequately fit within the tradition of a Reformed doctrine of Scripture? Considering the history of the Reformed church and the presence of diverse Reformed groups, it would be appropriate to observe that Reformed theology is not a single strand of thought but a school of thought with many strands.[494] The different strands of Reformed theology mostly build their identity on the basis of different positions of the doctrine of Scripture. As stated earlier, it is beyond the scope of this research to include discussion on the identity of a genuine Reformed church/theologian. For the purpose of this evaluation, I will link my Reformed identity to the Reformed Presbyterian church of India (RPCI) which accepts the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Shorter and Larger Catechisms as their official documents.[495] The RPCI unofficially follows the theological paradigm endorsed by the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA). The present evaluation of Vanhoozer's doctrine of Scripture is in interaction with the doctrine of Scripture endorsed by RPCI. It portrays that Vanhoozer's reframed theology of Scripture is relevant for India.

What is the status of the reframed doctrine of the Word of God in the Hermeneutical theology of Vanhoozer? Vanhoozer has explicitly stated that neither the Word of God nor God should be the foundation for doing theology. In fact, the question should not be 'either-or' but instead 'both-and'. Hence, he employs Kelsey's proposal who takes both God and Scripture into consideration in theological formation. For Kelsey, it is the "pre-text" *sensus fidelium* (faith of the people in God's role in their community through Scripture), which is the deciding factor in interpreting the relationship between God and the Bible.[496] Although Vanhoozer's Theological hermeneutics considers God and Scripture intertwined, he perceives Scripture as the collection of God's communicative action and not mere sets of propositions. The deciding factor in theology is not faith or pre-text in God decided by the community, but trusting the Scripture as

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[494] A.T.B. McGowan, "Renewing a Doctrine of Scripture," in *Revisioning, Renewing, Rediscovering the Triune Center: Essays in Honor of Stanley J. Grenz*, ed. Derek J. Tidball, Brian S. Harris, and Jason S. Sexton (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2014), Theological method, Kindle edition.

[495] "Form of Government: The Reformed Presbyterian Church of India" RPCI tradition believes in a high view of Scripture, Scripture as an indubitable foundation of theology. Some of the subordinate authorities are the Westminster standards, the three forms of Unity, and the theological traditions proposed by Calvin, Warfield, and Hodge, to name a few theologians.

[496] Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 30.

authoritative. Scripture is the collection of the communicative actions of God (God's performance) through diverse ways (for example, commanding, promising, warning, and comforting), which give wisdom (not simply propositions or knowledge of God), so that we can perform the Word of God. Therefore, the success of theology is a matter of wisdom: performing the communication action of God. Vanhoozer implements a reframed doctrine of Scripture as postpropositionalist, postfoundationalist and postconservative. Hence, the evaluation will be done cogitating Vanhoozer's proposal.

First is the doctrine of Scripture within a postpropositionalist approach to theology. Vanhoozer indisputably expands on the Reformed theology of Scripture in his hermeneutical theology; by employing idioms, concepts, metaphors, and philosophies from secular, religious, western and non-western contexts. Vanhoozer has consistently and persistently maintained his affirmation on the authority of Scripture. He affirms, "The final authority over matters of faith and life, including biblical interpretation itself, must be Scripture."[497] Further, Vanhoozer's affirmation of the authority of Scripture, the work of the Holy Spirit and the role of human authors is in continuity with the Reformed doctrine of Scripture as they are based on various Reformed sources such as the Westminster Confession of Faith 1.4,

> The Bible ought to be believed and obeyed because of its authority. This authority is not based on the testimony of any human being or church. Rather, this authority comes from God who is the author of the Bible, and is truth itself. Therefore, the Bible is to be received, because it is the word of God.[498]

Calvin's *Institutes* 6.2,
> Whether God revealed himself to the fathers by oracles and visions, or, by the instrumentality and ministry of men, suggested what they were to hand down to posterity, there cannot be a doubt that the certainty of what he taught them was firmly engraven on their hearts, so that they felt assured and knew that the things which they learnt came forth from God, who invariably accompanied his word with a sure testimony, infinitely superior to mere opinion.[499]

Bavinck says,

> For Holy Scripture uses the language of everyday experience, which is and remains always true, and addresses us in the core of our being as religious creatures who long for fellowship with God. The Bible is a book for humanity, for concrete life; it speaks in ordinary human language, language that is intelligible to the most simple person, clear to the learned and unlearned alike.[500]

Vanhoozer's reformulation of the Reformed doctrine of Scripture is a response to the challenges posed by modernity and postmodernity. He used contemporary conceptual aids to redefine the theology of Scripture. In responding to challenges posed by modernity, Vanhoozer presents the Scripture as authoritative over Christian faith and life, not just as an epistemic norm (propositional knowledge),

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[497] Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology," 85.

[498] Mohan Chacko, *The Westminster Confession of Faith in Simple English* (Dehradun, UK: [unknown], 2018), 8.

[499] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 6.2 eBook format.

[500] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, vol. Abridged in one volume (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 109.

but also as a sapiential norm (practical wisdom), which claims to entail performance and participation. Likewise, Vanhoozer affirms the authority of Scripture while encountering the challenges posed by postmodernity. He brought forth the contributions of polyphonic voices in producing the Bible. The focus of his theological hermeneutics was not just the independent work of the Holy Spirit in inspiration of Scripture, but also the human voices and pluriformity that were expressed in diverse literary genres. However, Vanhoozer's explicit attention to the importance of human authors and literary genres could be misconstrued as an argument for dual authorship, that is, divine and human authorship. Although the contribution of human authors and literary genres in the revelation and inspiration of Scripture are mentioned by Calvin and in the *Westminster Confession of Faith,* not enough emphasis is given to the contribution of the human authors in the doctrine of Scripture and the value of literary genres in developing theology. While responding to the challenge of postmodernity, Vanhoozer presents the authority of the Scripture, not as a magical or supernatural book, but within canonical triangulation: The mighty work of God in Jesus Christ, interaction of human authors with God and the work of the Holy Spirit in leading human authors to truly understand the act. Vanhoozer's theology of Scripture goes beyond that of Warfield and Hodge, moving ahead with them but not against the Reformed faith. Vanhoozer reformulates the doctrine of Scripture within the Reformed tradition, but without compromising the authority of the Scripture. The reconstruction by persistent attention to the work of the Holy Spirit in producing the Bible is also within the Reformed confessional grid. Vern S. Poythress, a PCA theologian, stresses the role of the Holy Spirit and the human authors in canonical formulation. He argues, "He [Holy Spirit] transforms sinful humanity towards humanity as God originally designed it."[501] A few passages as evidence from the documents of Reformed theology substantiate Vanhoozer's reformulation.

> The Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.[502] (Westminster confession 1.10)

> Whether God revealed himself to the fathers by oracles and visions, or, by the instrumentality and ministry of men, suggested what they were to hand down to posterity, there cannot be a doubt that the certainty of what he taught them was firmly engraven on their hearts, so that they felt assured and knew that the things which they learnt came forth from God, who invariably accompanied his word with a sure testimony, infinitely superior to mere opinion. …[503] (*Institutes 1.6.2)*

> It is necessary to attend to what I lately said, that our faith in doctrine is not established until we have a perfect conviction that God is its author. Hence, the highest proof of Scripture is uniformly taken from the character of him whose Word it is. The prophets and apostles boast not their own acuteness or any qualities which win credit to speakers, nor do they dwell on reasons; but they appeal to the sacred name of God, in order that the whole world may be compelled to submission. …Our conviction of the truth of Scripture

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[501] Vern S. Poythress et al., "Biblical Hermeneutics," in *Seeing Christ in All of Scripture: Hermeneutics at Westminster Theological Seminary*, ed. Peter A. Lillback, Kindle edition (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster Seminary Press, 2016), Human Authors, eBook format.

[502] Shaw, *An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1.10, Kindle version.

[503] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.6.2 Kindle Version.

must be derived from a higher source than human conjectures, judgments, or reasons; namely, the secret testimony of the Spirit. [504] (*Institutes 1.7.4*)

I confess, however, that in elegance and beauty, nay, splendour, the style of some of the prophets is not surpassed by the eloquence of heathen writers. By examples of this description, the Holy Spirit was pleased to show that it was not from want of eloquence he in other instances used a rude and homely style. But whether you read David, Isaiah, and others of the same class, whose discourse flows sweet and pleasant; or Amos the herdsman, Jeremiah, and Zechariah, whose rougher idiom savours of rusticity; that majesty of the Spirit to which I adverted appears conspicuous in all. …[505] (*Institutes 1.8.2*)

How does one maintain the authority of Scripture? On one hand, if the authority of Scripture is emphasized in the supernatural work of God, authority based on the verbal inspiration of God; human beings are then perceived as mere ciphers or robots (Mechanical view). On the other hand, if the emphasis is given to the significant role of the human beings in producing and knowing the meaning of Scripture, the view is immediately considered as liberal, which then classifies Scripture as a human document. Keeping this theological conundrum in consideration, how does Vanhoozer settle the question of the authority of the Bible? Vanhoozer argues that Warfield and Hodge (spokespersons of Reformed theology) perceived the authority of the Scripture on the basis of propositional revelation, verbal inspiration, errorless record of the Bible, and the Bible as cognitive sense. In an observation by Helm and McGowan, Vanhoozer blames Warfield and Hodge for reducing the Bible to mere compilations of propositions. Helm observes Vanhoozer's assertion that propositionalists have flattened or reduced the Bible to set of propositions.[506] McGowan concurs with Vanhoozer when he charges the rationalistic approach of the propositionalist for "undermining the authority of the Scripture."[507] Yet, Helm criticizes Vanhoozer for caricaturing the Reformed theologians to prove his point. Although, Vanhoozer strongly criticized the propositionalist approach to theology, he, however, claims to expand on the authority of the Scripture built on the propositionalist view. He affirms this approach is one that goes beyond (expanding/reformulating), but not against the propositionalist view. He calls this a postpropositionalist view of Scripture. As described earlier, Vanhoozer redefines and explains this theological conundrum using the Speech-Act and Drama metaphor. Vanhoozer neither overemphasises nor undermines the role of human beings in inspiration, revelation and sufficiency of Scripture but reformulates it in a way that the supernatural work of God and the role of human beings in producing the Bible are counterbalanced. Also, the significance of this counterbalance, of divine and human authors in inspiration, can be seen as a guide in contextual hermeneutics. And this not simply as a cognitive source but also to participate in, and improvise the work of God in any given context. The Reformed doctrine of Scripture, as Poythress stressed, seems to downplay this counterbalance envisaged by Vanhoozer. Poythress believes that in inspiration, the human authors were perfected, like originally created human beings, based on

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[504] Calvin, 1.7.4, Kindle version.

[505] Calvin, 1.8.2, Kindle Version.

[506] Helm, *Faith, Form, and Fashion*, The "Flattening" of Scripture, Kindle Version.

[507] A. T. B McGowan, *The Divine Spiration of Scripture: Challenging Evangelical Perspectives* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), 116.

the identity of Christ. Moreover, this fullness of humanity cannot be comprehended by normal everyday human communication. He argues, "His presence and his special work in inspiration do not make human beings less than human. He transforms sinful humanity towards humanity as God originally designed it. But that fullness of humanity is not something that we can equate with our most prosaic pictures of flat and one-dimensional communication."[508] Poythress' view seems to argue for the passive role of the human authors, and where their language, thought forms, and literary fashions of the places and times at which they were written are undermined. This is where Vanhoozer goes beyond the Reformed doctrine of Scripture. It is a positive approach which takes the Reformed view of Scripture into consideration and yet counterbalances the previous Reformed view. He picks up and expands the role of the human authors, by giving credit not only to their inspiration by the Holy Spirit, but also to the prosaicness of the human authors, relating it to the readers' prosaic day-to-day concerns. More pointedly, Vanhoozer goes beyond the Reformed view by insisting that the special work of the Holy Spirit in transforming human authors does not cancel or erase the nature of the situatedness of these human authors but rather maintains and sanctifies it.

Vanhoozer further develops this counterbalance in his hermeneutical theology. He acknowledges the performance of the triune God as well as the human authors. Vanhoozer attempts to bring into attention the high view of Scripture, as Reformed theology does, along with the prominent role of the human authors, addressing the challenges of postmodernity and their view of Scripture. Vanhoozer astutely emphasizes the work of the triune God (Divine action) in producing the Scripture. He does so with a significant stress on the role of the Holy Spirit in prompting the human authors. It is noteworthy how Vanhoozer, like Berkhof and Bavinck before him, retrieves the organic nature of the inspiration of Scripture that was given mere lip service in the Reformed theology of Scripture. Eglinton notes Bavinck's observation that the early Reformers did not develop the organic motif of Scripture.[509] Vanhoozer emphasizes the organic motif of the inspiration of Scripture in concurrence with a Reformed view of Scripture. Vanhoozer retrieves and expands on Calvin's assertion about the importance of the literary genres, and the prompting of the human authors in producing the Bible. One of the theses of Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology stresses, "To call the Bible "Scripture" is to acknowledge a divine intention that does not contravene, but supervenes on, the communicative intentions of its human author."[510] The tension, however, lies in the role of the human authors through the work of the Holy Spirit in producing the Bible. Calvin seems to argue that literary genres do not impinge the work of the Triune God, whereas Vanhoozer purports that Divine intention supervenes the intention of human authors or literary genres. It should be noted, however, that Calvin neither rejects the role of human beings altogether, nor does he stress only the organic nature of inspiration. Considering the contextual challenges of postmodernity, Vanhoozer credits the human authors for their role in producing the Bible, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Vanhoozer's emphasis on the human authors should not be misconstrued as

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[508] Poythress et al., "Biblical Hermeneutics," Human Authors, eBook format.

[509] James Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif* (London, New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 165.

[510] Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 292.

undermining the high view of Scripture. In fact, Vanhoozer stresses the work of God the Holy Spirit through the human authors, and not as an independent work. This approach is compatible with Calvin. Calvin argues,

> It is necessary to attend to what I lately said, that our faith in doctrine is not established until we have a perfect conviction that God is its author. Hence, the highest proof of Scripture is uniformly taken from the character of him whose Word it is. The prophets and apostles boast not their own acuteness or any qualities which win credit to speakers, nor do they dwell on reasons; but they appeal to the sacred name of God, in order that the whole world may be compelled to submission. …[511]

Günther Haas, a proponent of the Theological hermeneutics of Scripture, makes an interesting observation where Calvin mentions the twofold authors of Scripture in his commentary. Haas, while expounding on Calvin's exegesis of 1 Timothy 4:1-5, observes that Calvin has referred to the Spirit and Paul interchangeably as the authors of the text.[512] He further indicates Calvin's commentary on 1 Peter 1:10-11 and 1 Corinthians 1:17, where Calvin has distinguished between the two (divine and human) authors.[513]

Further, Vanhoozer's reformulation of the doctrine of Scripture is in line with Louis Berkhof's insistence on the role of human authors. Berkhof argues that it may seem that seventeenth century Reformed theology regarded human authors as mere amanuenses. On the contrary, he argues that the Reformed theologians did not support the mechanical view of Scripture. He refers to *Confessio Belgica* as evidence to state his point.[514] He argues, "[Reformed theologians] adopt a view which recognizes them as real authors and does full justice to their personal share in the production of their writings."[515] Furthermore, Berkhof points to the importance of the prosaic nature of the human writer, which is amply evident in Vanhoozer's postpropositionalist view of Scripture. Berkhof argues,

> [God] used them just as they were, with their character and temperament, their gifts and talents, their education and culture, their vocabulary, diction, and style. … [God] guided them in an organic way in the choice of their words and in the expression of their thoughts. … It testifies to the fact that the writers of the books of the Bible were not passive but active.[516]

Vanhoozer's insistence on authority of the human authors in producing the Bible seems to be in line with Barth's doctrine of Scripture as stated in Confession of

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[511] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, section 1.7.4 Kindle version.

[512] Günther Haas, "Calvin as a Model for Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Illustrated with His Exegesis of 1Tim. 4:1-5," in *Calvin Today: Reformed Theology and the Future of the Church*, ed. Michael Welker, Ulrich Möller, and Michael Weinrich (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), The twofold author: human and divine, Kindle version.

[513] Haas, footnote no. 61, Kindle version.

[514] Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, New Combined edition (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), Nature and Extent of its Inspiration, Kindle Version.

[515] Berkhof, Organic Inspiration, Kindle version.

[516] Berkhof, Organic Inspiration, Kindle Version.

1967. Allen notes Barth's belief in an organic motif recorded in the declaration of the Confession.

> The Scriptures, given under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, are nevertheless the words of men, conditioned by the language, thought forms, and literary fashions of the places and times at which they were written. They reflect views of life, history, and the cosmos which were then current. The church, therefore, has an obligation to approach the Scriptures with literary and historical understanding. (Confession of 1967 [C-67], 1.C.2, in *BC*, p. 325) [517]

Furthermore, Vanhoozer's insistence on the role of human authors (an organic motif of Scripture) and literary genres comply with Bavinck, Berkouwer, and a few other leading luminary Reformed theologians. Bavinck, also emphasizes the organic motif of Scripture and observes that the full involvement of human authors was weakly developed by Reformed theologians in the past.[518] He argues that in a proper view of inspiration, "Special revelation should never be separated from its organic connection to history, the world, and humanity."[519] Further, Bavinck argues that in emphasizing the supernatural element in inspiration too strongly we detach human authors from the Bible. He argues, "This [a mechanical notion] detaches the Bible writers from their personality, as it were, and lifts them out of the history of their time. In the end it allows them to function only as mindless, inanimate instruments in the hand of the Holy Spirit."[520] More strongly, argues Bavinck, "The use of sources, the authors' familiarity with earlier writings, their own inquiries, memory reflection, and life experience are all included by the organic view."[521] Vanhoozer seems to be in line with Berkouwer, who endorses the organic motif of Scripture. Berkouwer's endorsement, however, comes with a caveat. He clarifies that organic, which means an organ or instrument, when applied to the inspiration of Scripture, does not mean that every single aspect of human activity is involved in the inspiration of Scripture.[522]

However, Robert L. Reymond, who has extensively followed Warfield, emphasizes the limitation of the role of the human author in an organic motif. He illustrates his point by referring to Paul's description of the work of the Holy Spirit in saving them from a tempestuous storm in Acts 27:15. He further translates it, "When the ship was caught [in the violent wind], and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and *we were driven along* [*epherometha*],"[523] Similarly, the human authors of Scripture were driven along in inspiration, which according to Reymond illustrates the passivity of prophets and human authors in

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[517] R. Michael Allen, *Doing Theology: Reformed Theology* (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2010), Holy Scripture, Kindle version.

[518] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Abridged in one volume:99. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics : Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, eBook (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), The rise of critical Protestantism, eBook.

[519] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics : Prolegomena*, Revelation in nature and holy Scripture, eBook.

[520] Bavinck, Differing views on inspiration, eBook.

[521] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Abridged in one volume:108. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics : Prolegomena*, A defense of organic inspiration, eBook.

[522] G. C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, trans. Jack B. Rogers (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975) in ibid., 158.

[523] Robert L Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, second edition (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), The Bible's inspiredness, Kindle Version.

regards to the revelation. He, conversely, clarifies the misconception of the passivity of the human authors. Reymond quotes Warfield extensively to substantiate his argument. He quotes,

> It is not intended to deny that the intelligence of the prophets was active in the reception of their message; it was by means of their active intelligence that their message was received: their intelligence was the instrument of revelation. It is intended to deny only that their intelligence was active in the production of their message: that it was creatively as distinguished from receptively active. For reception itself is a kind of activity.[524]

Vanhoozer uses the metaphor of prompting in his redefinition of inspiration which takes his view forward or post or in line with classical Reformed view. The usage of "prompting" by Vanhoozer, points to the work of the Holy Spirit in inspiration. The Holy Spirit guided the human authors in witnessing, urging, assisting, prompting, calling to mind, supplying the right word, and articulating. This suggests the authority for both the reception and the production (content and form) of the inspiration, without denying the authority of God speaking in and through the Scriptures.

It will come as no surprise that Vanhoozer's noticeable insistence on the role of human authors can easily be pigeonholed as contrary to the Reformed doctrine of Scripture. Further, Vanhoozer's assertion on the divine action of God in inspiration, argued through speech-act and drama, rejects the dichotomy between personal and propositional inspiration, divine and human of Scripture.[525] Vanhoozer construes inspiration, not as God's word, but God's speech-act. Inspiration in Vanhoozer's theo-dramatic understanding is "a matter of the Spirit's prompting the human authors to say just what the divine playwright intended."[526]

Having said that, is Vanhoozer's criticism of the classical Reformed view legitimate in saying that they have reduced Scripture to a mere compilation of propositions? Vanhoozer is astute in his observation that the classical Reformed view of Scripture somehow presented a magical view of Scripture or conjured up the Bible as a sort of talisman, so that in many contexts it is considered divine. This view runs the risk of bibliolatry. The researcher thinks that the allegation that Scripture was reduced to mere propositions or theological data, and that this risked the authority of the Bible, is mere exaggeration. It will not be incorrect to say that the classical Reformed view does aim to draw timeless truths or propositions from the Bible, yet also has a significant place for literary genres and the role of the human authors in inspiration. The goal of exegesis in the classical Reformed view is to draw timeless truths, but it does so by involving the role of the human in producing the Scriptures. It is evident in Reymond's argument. He asserts, "Despite the "occasional" or ad hoc character of its many literary parts, the Scripture's doctrine of Scripture binds us to view its teachings as timeless truths intended "for our instruction, reproof, correction, and training in

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[524] Benjamin B. Warfield, "The Biblical Idea of Revelation," in The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), 91, in Reymond, The Bible's Inspiredness, Kindle Version.

[525] McGowan, *The Divine Spiration of Scripture*, 117.

[526] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 227.

righteousness.""[527] He further affirms that the classical Reformed view, which follows the grammatical/historical method of exegesis, requires the exegete to place himself into the human author's "… linguistic, cultural, historical and religious shoes to discover the *writer's* intended meaning."[528] Does that mean that the propositional approach to Scripture reduces the authority of biblical truth? No, it does not. Propositional truth does not manipulate the truth, but it may hinder the appropriation of it. For example, "Jesus is Lord" (Romans 10: 9) is a timeless truth, and will remain so in any reproduction. However, if the context of this truth "Jesus is Lord" (role of the human authors) is not considered as important as the truth, how will the church appropriate this truth within their context? Moreover, how will Jesus become Lord of the church in everyday situations? As argued earlier, Vanhoozer's speech-act and theo-drama metaphor transcends the debilitating dichotomy between personal and propositional, Divine-human nature of Scripture. Vanhoozer calls this approach a prosaic Spirit or Spirit of contextualization.

Vanhoozer's doctrine of Scripture is a significant proposal for multi-religious contexts. Since all religious scriptures are connected to divine, these religious texts (including the Bible) are perceived as magical talismans. By presenting the canonical triangulation, Vanhoozer cements the credibility of the Bible as the inspired revelation of God, which brings to life the historical reality of the human authors in a contemporary situation. Any reformulation or reproduction of Scripture will risk the authority of Scripture, be it any theology, confession or creed, because no reformulation can replace Scripture. And yet, the church/theologian, with all due precaution and trusting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit, should continue to interpret Scripture to extend the kingdom of God.

Next is the authority of Scripture in Vanhoozer's postfoundationalist approach to theology. Defining foundationalism and nonfoundationalism will first assist us to understand Vanhoozer's postfoundationalist approach. Foundationalism is set by modernity. Hence, "Foundationalism is an epistemology (theory of knowledge) that likens what we know to a pyramid based on a set of indubitable beliefs."[529] On the contrary, nonfoundationalism is influenced by postmodernity. It rejects any data or truth claims as a foundation, as the basis for belief in God or truth. It perceives knowledge as a web, net, or mosaic of belief, where "… no one belief is more important than any other."[530] Vanhoozer demurs to both foundationalism and nonfoundationalism. However, Vanhoozer is not limited by only two options of absoluteness and relativity. He obliterates the boundaries set by modernity and postmodernity by proposing a postfoundationalist approach to theology. While formulating his postfoundationalist theology, Vanhooozer is watchful not to succumb to the other kind of postfoundationalisms which replace 'the life of the church and cultural linguistic practices' for foundationalism's set of indubitable beliefs.[531] Does Vanhoozer's postfoundationalist approach consider Scripture as the foundation for

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[527] Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, Hermeneutical implications, Kindle version.

[528] Reymond, Hermeneutical Implications, Kindle version.

[529] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 292.

[530] Vanhoozer, 293.

[531] Vanhoozer, 294–95.

theology as an old verity that needs to be replaced? Vanhoozer disagrees with foundationalism because he does not consider knowledge to be indubitable, holy grail, and incorrigible. Foundationalism also underestimates the sinfulness of human beings and the noetic consequences of sin. He further disagrees with foundationalism because of its detrimental effect on the understanding and interpretation of the diverse literary genres found in Scripture which are crucial for comprehensively processing the canonical truth. Also, foundationalism gives priority to "… certain type of procedure for generating knowledge that abstracts the *knower* from the process as well."[532] As Kees van Kralingen strongly puts it, Vanhoozer refers to foundationalism as neither biblical nor evangelical. Vanhoozer perceives foundation as a fiduciary framework. For Vanhoozer, human beings are sinful and hence knowledge cannot be an indubitable and incorrigible foundation but must be mediated via an interpretive framework.[533] Salvation is necessary for this knowledge which comes only from God who is trustworthy and who reveals this truth in Christ. Hence "The postfoundationalist seeks to "hold onto the ideals of truth, objectivity, and rationality, while at the same time acknowledging the provisional, contextual, and fallible nature of human reason.""[534] Vanhoozer charts his way as a response to the Reformed doctrine of Scripture which is influenced by modernity and sees foundation as indubitable truth. Vanhoozer focuses on God as an actor who Himself reveals and uses Scripture to change us into renewed covenant partners. Here the first and the foremost actor is not the foundation nor the subject but rather God who saves the subject. Vanhoozer's postfoundationalism argues against the Reformed doctrine of Scripture's emphasis on the subject of epistemology which becomes the primary foundation where the authority of the Bible is relegated to certain types of information and propositions. Further, the doctrine of Scripture in classical Reformed theology is bifurcated from the doctrine of God, Christ and the Holy Spirit in systematic theology or dogmatics.[535] In Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology, the doctrine of God is interwoven with the doctrine of Scripture. Hence, "Knowledge of God begins with trust in what we have been told about God by God, and this means taking the canon as the beginning of theological knowledge, the interpretive framework for understanding God, the world, and ourselves."[536] De Bruijne calls the postfoundationalist approach a third way between classical rational certainty and postmodern relativism.[537] He argues,

> [The third way] consists of *trusting* that God through the Bible spreads enough light. This trust leads to *boldness* to expect God's word, and *courage* to take the best possible next

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[532] Vanhoozer, 292.

[533] Vanhoozer, 293.

[534] Vanhoozer, 293.

[535] Hans Burger, "Why Do You Believe That Scripture Is the Word of God? Owen's Doctrine of Scripture Reconsidered," in *John Owen between Orthodoxy and Modernity.*, ed. Willem van Vlastuin and Kelly M Kapic, vol. 39, Studies in Reformed Theology (Leiden, Boston: BRILL, 2019), 131.

[536] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 295.

[537] Ad L. Th. de Bruijne, "Christian Ethics and God's Use of the Bible," in *Correctly Handling the Word of Truth: Reformed Hermeneutics Today*, ed. Mees te Velde and Gerhard H. Visscher (Wipf & Stock, 2014), 174.

step, and at the same time it calls for *modesty*, for we advance only step by step and should not forget that we can also be mistaken.[538]

Vanhoozer's postfoundationalist approach to Scripture gives a sense of modesty in his claim, and it also builds trust in God's word.

In RPCI, the authority of Scripture has always been in line with classical Reformed theology influenced by modernity's hermeneutical method. Vanhoozer's postfoundationalist approach definitely challenges the RPCI because it questions their incontrovertible rational certainty of the canon being the foundation of Christian faith. It will not only address the RPCI's exclusive attitude towards other religious truth claims or interpretive frameworks, but as De Bruijne puts it, will "take the wind out of threatening skeptical sails"[539] of the religious pluralist in the Indian context. Vanhoozer's postfoundationalist approach to theology will not only bring humility in their knowledge about the claim of Scripture, but it also could take off pressure to prove the exclusivity of their beliefs to the other religious claims,[540] and hence bridge the gap in interfaith dialogue between the RPCI, other religions, and the pluralists. Furthermore, how does one trust that their framework is true amidst other existing religious frameworks? Vanhoozer answers,

> We trust the canonical maps because we trust the map makers (the commissioned witnesses and their commissioner), because just these maps yield greater coherence and intelligibility than other maps that humans have yet devised, and because following just these maps is indeed the way to wisdom and human flourishing. [541]

However, since Vanhoozer keeps an ear tuned to postmodernity there is suspicion that Vanhoozer's fiduciary framework is open to subjectivity. Theodore G. Van Raalte argues that the postfoundationalist approach will not be able to state the distinctiveness of the Bible. He argues, "An answer that appeals to the freedom and intuition of the artisan is far too subjective."[542] Whereas, Kees Van Kralingen asserts that Vanhoozer's postfoundationalist approach is similar to the Reformed classical view, but explained with different metaphors.[543] Vanhoozer employs the analogies of an atlas, a map, speech act, and drama. He argues,

> "Following maps" is better image because it recognises the priority of the canonical text and its relationship to reality- *just these maps*- over one's use of reading of it. Moreover, the drama of doctrine is precisely that using the biblical maps to negotiate one's walk on

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[538] de Bruijne, 174 De Bruijne, in footnote no. 13, supports his argument by indicating to a similar approach taken by Vanhoozer. Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 231–35, 334–73.

[539] de Bruijne, "Christian Ethics and God's Use of the Bible," 173.

[540] R. Scott Smith, "Post-Conservative, Foundationalism, and Theological Truth: A Critical Evaluation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no. 2 (June 2005): 351.

[541] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 305.

[542] Theodore G. Van Raalte, "Christian Ethics and God's Use of the Bible: A Response," in *Correctly Handling the Word of Truth: Reformed Hermeneutics Today*, ed. Mees te Velde and Gerhard H. Visscher (Wipf & Stock, 2014), 193.

[543] Kees van Kralingen, "The Quest for Our Source of Authority: An Evaluation of Vanhoozer's Canonical-Linguistic Approach," in *Evangelicals and Sources of Authority: Essays Under the Auspices of the Center of Evangelical Reformation Theology*, ed. Miranda Klaver, Stefan Paas, and Eveline van Staalduine-Sulman, Amsterdam Studies in Theology and Religions (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2016), The position and role of the canonical Scriptures, eCopy.

the way to truth and life. The maps call attention to the fact that the church's interpretive framework is *canonical* before it is *communal*.[544]

Further, it should be mentioned that Vanhoozer's use of the metaphor of the canonical text as a map is limited because an atlas too provides people with accurate information but not living experience (acts) in the way that Scripture does. Trust is about the living experience told by the Triune God about God and human beings in Scripture and not just information. Also, Vanhoozer says that maps are not universal.[545] Does that mean that the Scripture, which is projected as maps, is not universally relevant? Further, Helm observes an interesting irony in Vanhoozer's section of analogies. He observes that although Vanhoozer criticizes classical Reformed theology for employing a pictorial-referential theory of language, he himself has used the (pictorial) map and atlas metaphors to state his argument.[546] Moreover, Vanhoozer's constant introduction of analogies like maps, atlases, compasses, and scales within the drama metaphor, without giving sufficient explanation or outlining their limitations leaves the reader confused and leads to misunderstanding. It should be mentioned that Vanhoozer does give a passing remark on the limitation of Script over atlas in portraying the plurality of Scripture.[547]

The third post in the doctrine of Scripture is the postconservative approach to theology. Simply put, the postconservative approach is a theological movement to bridge the gap between conservatives and postmoderns. Berry defines conservatives as a group who are influenced by the modernity epistemological foundationalism, modern versions of scientific inquiry, and propositional revelation.[548] There are various approaches taken by the post conservative approach to theology. Some, like Meliorists, would like to make significant changes in the church tradition of historic orthodoxy, but others, like traditionalists, would rather modify their approach. McDermott observes that most Arminian theologians fall into the Meliorists approach and Reformed theologians into the traditional approach.[549] As observed by McDermott, Vanhoozer stays committed to the Reformed tradition to modify the approach. Vanhoozer perceives that the role of the Spirit is significant in inspiring the propositions (divine content), yet at the same time, he modifies his approach by giving authoritative status also to the way the Holy Spirit communicates the content of Scripture through the human authors via diverse literary genres. Two general remarks: first, Vanhoozer's arguments for the postconservative approach to theology overlap with the other posts, i.e. postpropositonalist and postfoundationalist approaches to theology. Second, although Vanhoozer moves beyond the conservative approach, he does not consider their constructive work finished or complete. Vanhoozer's postconservative approach breaks through the

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[544] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 294.

[545] Vanhoozer, 296.

[546] Helm, *Faith, Form, and Fashion*, Vanhoozer on post-foundationalism, Kindle version.

[547] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 296.

[548] Berry, "Theological vs. Methodological Postconservatism," 119.

[549] Gerald McDermott, "Evangelicals Divided: The Battle between Meliorists and Traditionists to Define Evangelicalism," First Things, April 2011, http://www.firstthings.com/article/2011/04/evangelicals-divided.

power structure of both modernity (conservative) and postmodernity approaches to theology.

Vanhoozer's postconservative approach attempts to transcend the dichotomy between God saying and God doing, between content and forms. He recognises the significance of literary forms in the divine communication action. Vanhoozer goes beyond, post or expands, the Reformed doctrine of Scripture by counterbalancing the significance of the human authors, literary genres and historical contexts which were considered secondary over the assertorical content. Vanhoozer moves from the notion where Revelation is considered supreme over the historical context in which God communicated. Vanhoozer departs from the classical Reformed view which considered history as a slave to proposition, or a means to an end. Gaffin invokes Vos to argue for Revelation as supreme over history. Gaffin quotes, "within Scripture and the history of revelation (of which the origin of Scripture is a part) the historical character of its truth, while integral, is subordinate to its revealed character. While historical development is essential, revelation, as he says, is "supreme""[550] Furthermore, he argues, "It is an unchristian and an unbiblical procedure to make development superior to revelation instead of revelation superior to development."[551] Vos continues,

> … in our treatment of Biblical theology is that the historical character of truth is not antithetical to, but throughout subordinate to, its revealed character. Scriptural truth is not absolute, notwithstanding its historic setting; but the historic setting has been employed by God for the very purpose of revealing the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.[552]

Berry observes that the elevation of revelation as supreme over the historical character of truth in a Reformed doctrine of Scripture comes as a response to the school of higher criticism which upheld the humanness of Scripture at the expense of its divine inspiration.[553] The other doctrinal challenge to elevate revelation over historical context in a Reformed doctrine of Scripture is a 'Christotelic' approach to the Old Testament. The Christotelic approach to Scripture reads the Old Testament with a two-tier reading method. The first reading of the Old Testament is within its original historical, human author meaning and only in the second reading is the Old Testament read from a Christological standpoint.[554] However, while talking about the historical character of divine revelation, Vanhoozer gives equal emphasis to both content and form, so that both form and content would guide the church to participate and improvise the drama of doctrine. The researcher concurs with Daniel M. Doriani who observes that in Vanhoozer's postconservative approach, Scripture is always at the backdrop of his theological arguments and its authority always assumed. However, it remains to be seen how Vanhoozer will use this approach with Scriptural exegesis and apply it in

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[550] Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "Biblical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary," in *Seeing Christ in All of Scripture: Hermeneutics at Westminster Theological Seminary*, ed. Peter A. Lillback, Kindle edition (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster Seminary Press, 2016), ebook format.

[551] Geerhardus Vos, "Hebrews, the Epistle of the Diatheke," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2001), 232-233.

[552] Vos, 232–33.

[553] Berry, "Theological vs. Methodological Postconservatism," 112.

[554] Gaffin Jr., "Biblical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary," eBook format.

everyday content. Doriani argues, "To be sure, Scripture is always in the background for Vanhoozer, suffusing his thought, but its presence is understated. It is a trait of his work that he neither quotes nor exegetes the Bible very much. I believe his work would be stronger if he presented additional biblical evidence for his proposal."[555]

Also, while arguing for postconservative theology as transformative, there seems to be an assumption by Vanhoozer that conservative theology is not transformative. Vanhoozer does not state how the conservative approach was not transformative. It is ironic that Vanhoozer marvels at the work of missionaries, who were agents of transformation, yet were proponents of conservative theology. He, in fact, refers to their work as the 'history of improvisation,' and yet presumes that their approach to theology was not transformative. Having said that, conservative and postconservative approaches should avoid the temptation of focusing on the human being, their actions and participations, as an agent of transformation. Instead, the focus should be on the source of transformation, who is the Triune God communicating in and through the Scriptures, and church as the agent of transformation.

Having considered Vanhoozer's doctrine of Scripture we may ask whether he has legitimately expanded the Reformed doctrine of Scripture. Indeed, one can conclude with a blunt YES in answer to this question. The research concludes that Vanhoozer does not reject the Reformed tradition of Scripture. He however disagrees on some occasions, and hence, develops what was underemphasized. Although there are modifications to the Reformed tradition by Vanhoozer, this reformulation should be perceived as an enrichment or expansion of the Reformed tradition in a postmodern context. Just as classical Reformed tradition's inspiration did not intend bibliolatry, Vanhoozer, in his reformulation, does not undermine the divine role while emphasizing the role of human authors in the inspiration of Scripture. Theodore Van Raalte would concur with Vanhoozer when he agrees with the view that 'rationality is not sufficient but absolutely necessary'[556] to know how God communicates through propositional data. Vanhoozer, too, has not completely denied the importance of reason and foundation but limited it to one's trust, discernment, and the organic nature of performing the communicative action of God in Scripture. However, Vanhoozer's postfoundationalist approach seems to diverge from the classical Reformed tradition, as he has indicated himself. He departs from the view that Scripture is the indubitable foundation of Christian faith. While arguing for the postfoundationalist approach, Vanhoozer has also parted ways with the classical Reformed method which employed scientific methodology (the Cartesian perspective) to set the parameter for God's communicative action.

Our second criterion for evaluation is: How is Vanhoozer's Theological hermeneutics a relevant proposal for addressing contextual challenges? Having

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[555] Daniel M. Doriani, "A Response to Kevin J. Vanhoozer," in *Four Views on Moving beyond the Bible to Theology*, ed. Gary T. Meadors, eBook edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009).

[556] Van Raalte, "Christian Ethics and God's Use of the Bible: A Response," 189.

investigated the nature of the authority of Scripture in Vanhoozer's postpropositionalist, postfoundationalist, and postconservative approach to theology, this section will now focus on how Vanhoozer's authority of Scripture is a relevant proposal for addressing contextual challenges such as multi-religiosity and religious power structure. This will be done within Vanhoozer's *Sapientia* approach to theology: practical wisdom (Prosaic) theological judgement (Phronetic) and confronting and enforcing the theo-dramatic reality (prophetic) in a multi religious context.

First is the Prosaic approach to theology. Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology has emphasized the need of the prosaic approach to theology. Vanhoozer's postpropositional emphasis on the literary genres of the Scriptures gives attention to the prosaic nature of Scripture. Giving prosaic attention to theology bridges the gap between the proses of Scripture and the prose of contemporary situational realities. The prose of Scripture assists in participating in and appropriating theo-drama. This emphasis in hermeneutics seems to be missing in previous theological approaches built on propositions, or was limited to the application of exegesis within preaching. The attention on literary genres also validates the references to other local genres while addressing contextual theology. One relevant example of practical wisdom (prosaic) used by Vanhoozer is the use of the 'drama' metaphor to improvise 'redemption: theo-drama' in a given context that is modern and postmodern, in secular and diverse denominational contexts.

David Bosch has rightly observed that the theological categories employed to serve our lenses to read Scripture are limited because they are inadequate and not corresponding to contemporary challenges.[557] Hence, we need new language, categories, metaphors, idioms, and concepts so that we can read Scripture afresh. Gordon Smith argues that including the prose of everyday situations will not only take us beyond the conventional conservative approach to Scripture but at the same time it will guide the church through the challenges of postmodernity and the reality of truth within diverse religions.[558] Vanhoozer has endeavoured to develop such an approach by employing prose of everyday situations of contemporary contexts which are relevant to appropriate theo-drama in a postmodern context and also to people of diverse faiths. Consequently, Vanhoozer uses several metaphors and conceptual aids to present the redefinition of Scripture and the redemptive work of Christ. Most common among them are the drama metaphor, the speech-act theory, and atlases and maps. The use of metaphors was a common pattern in Calvin's theology, and has also been used by other Reformed theologians. Another Reformed theologian, Horton, employs the drama model and considers it holistic and superior to other existing models, such as the pictorial model. Along with Horton and Vanhoozer, there are other scholars like Hans Urs

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[557] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1991), 483.

[558] Gordon T. Smith, "Religions and the Bible: An Agenda for Evangelicals," in *Christianity and The Religions: A Biblical Theology of World Religions*, ed. Edward Rommen and Harold A. Netland, Evangelical Missiological Society Series, Number 2 (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1995), Re-examining the Scriptures, eBook format.

von Balthasar, Rene Girards, K. Schilder and Geerhardus Vos,[559] Clement of Alexandria, John Calvin, Pedre Calderón de la Barca, Tom Wright[560] who have employed the drama analogy. The research concurs with Vanhoozer that there is indeed an advantage in using prose and conceptual aids to develop theology. For example, Reymond observes three metaphors used by Calvin to explain the doctrine of Scripture; namely, Scripture as spectacles (*Institutes* 1.6.1, 1.14.1), the Scriptures as a thread to guide our path while running through a labyrinth (*Institutes* 1.6.3), and a teacher (*Institutes* 1.6.2).[561] Jerry Bilkes, on the other hand points out even more metaphors used by Calvin as conceptual aids to understand the doctrine of Scripture. These metaphors are: Speech from God, the school of God, the sun, shield, safety and solace, sweetness, and song.[562] Although Calvin has used several metaphors as conceptual tools to describe his theology, the conceptual aids did not seem to overshadow the doctrinal truth. There is no denying the fact that Vanhoozer's conceptual aids have improved on the presentation of Scripture and redemption in theology. In fact, Vanhoozer claims that his approach to theology (using metaphors) is more persuasive than categories in classical Reformed theology.[563] However, the metaphors of drama and speech-act employed by Vanhoozer to perceive Scripture as a Divine communication act easily overshadow the doctrinal matters in his presentation. The mode ends up becoming the object of the argument. This could result in syncretism: the intermixing of religion and secular worldview. As a result, a method such as this runs the risk of confusion between the mode and the object. For example, Vanhoozer uses the metaphor of drama to present the communication action of God. Drama is used as a metaphor to structure the biblical story into five acts, but the metaphor (drama) itself cannot be the subject matter of theology: theo-drama. Also, Scripture can be perceived as God's words and action through speech-act theory, but Scripture cannot be reduced to a mere conceptual theory or comprehended through a metaphor. The redemptive work of Christ is more than a drama, and Scripture more than a script. Every biblical doctrine cannot be explained through the drama metaphor. Vanhoozer has employed metaphors so persuasively that the reader is often forced to find a counterpart for every minute element of drama within the redemptive work of Christ. This could lead readers to misinterpretation or even to a limited view of the work of God. This is evident by the prevailing fact that there was confusion over the drama metaphor and its relation to theology. This very confusion compelled Vanhoozer to devote an entire section in his latest book to clarify these misunderstandings.[564] The confusion between the mode and the object would be even more challenging if the borrowed conceptual modes are religious in nature. This is normally labelled as syncretism because it is within religion-religion intermixing. Ninian Smart and Steven Konstantine are astute in their observation that churches are blind to religion and

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[559] Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 10, footnote 20.

[560] Wesley Vander Lugt, *Living Theodrama: Reimagining Theological Ethics* (England/ Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014), The theatrical turn in Christian theology, Ebook format.

[561] Reymond, "Calvin's Doctrine of Holy Scripture," 46–47.

[562] Jerry Bilkes, "Calvin on the Word of God," in *Calvin for Today*, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), How God's Word comes to us, Kindle edition.

[563] Helm, *Faith, Form, and Fashion*, Narrative theology, Kindle edition.

[564] Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding*, 243–52.

secular worldview syncretism and more alert towards religion-religion syncretism. They observe, "It is a strange thing that churches have often been worried about religion-religion syncretism and relatively blind to religion-secular world-view syncretism."[565] A strategy to fully depend on conceptual aids to understand Scripture and the redemptive work of Christ may run the risk of reducing the subject matter to mere metaphors and concepts. In other words, our metaphors become our presuppositions that limit the subject matter of theology to that presupposition. After all, drama is just a platform where an actor temporarily pretends to be a character. Or, as Helm observes, the characters of the Bible did not rehearse their lines, wear stage makeup, or try different costumes; their pain, tears and wounds were real.[566]

Vanhoozer's validity of diverse genres in Scripture and their role in constituting the meaning of Scripture argues for a plurality of ecclesial traditions in order to understand the complete meaning of theo-drama. This approach to theology will definitely guide RPCI towards further fellowship with other ecclesial traditions amidst denominational power structures. Although Vanhoozer's proposal endorses the Reformed tradition, it is not tied down to one particular set of ecclesial traditions. Since Christians in India are a small group, Vanhoozer's proposal will unite the churches in spite of ecclesial diversity. A multiperspectival theological approach will give RPCI enough liberty to hold on to one's preferred ecclesial tradition, and yet seek enrichment from other theological traditions. However, Vanhoozer's multiperspectival theological approach overlooks the existence of rigid denominational differences based on Scripture which have divided the churches. History, even the Reformation history itself, is proof of the rough and irreconcilable differences in denominational theologies. Even as Vanhoozer celebrates the broadening and enriching of Theo-drama through the cacophony of denominational voices, how should the church practically tolerate denominational differences? What is lacking in Vanhoozer's multiperspectival theological approach is a solution to deal with the dramatic change needed in the present day intolerance towards denominational differences. Even after taking into account the limitations, Vanhoozer's proposal remains desperately needed for developing tolerance between denominations and their differences and guiding the Indian church through combatting denominational factions. It also has significant theological implications for forward movement in addressing contextual concerns in a multi-religious context.

Second, Vanhoozer's *sapientia* approach considers the phronetic approach to theology, a deciding factor for its uniqueness. That is, it is only through wisdom, discernment, theological judgement, and appropriating the theological knowledge that Christians have an opportunity to stake truth claims. This phronetic approach offers the RPCI a platform for improvisation. That is, they can transpose the Gospel through theological judgement in creative use of metaphor, local idioms, conceptual tools, and hermeneutical methods. Vanhoozer has strongly argued for theological judgment in improvising by using the prosaic approach to theology. This approach, however, does not take into consideration

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[565] Ninian Smart and Steven Konstantine, *Christian Systematic Theology in a World Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 39.

[566] Helm, *Faith, Form, and Fashion*, theodrama, kindle version.

the church and church leaders who do not have either the capacity or the resources to inculcate sufficient theological judgment. The majority of Christians in India are not educated.[567] Coming to Christ is mostly based on the experience of healing, God's provision for the family, security from an evil spirit or spirits, and much less from doctrinal persuasion. How does theo-dramatic judgement and improvisation, (which entails training, discernment in theological judgment, theological competence and interpretive virtues), guide them in everyday theology? Does this mean that the work of the dramaturge/theologian belongs to the elite and educated class? Also, the training that is required to improvise should not centre on extrapolating already formed ecclesial traditions, but should initiate discussions/training on how to improvise the theo-dramatic script in a given context. Or else, the RPCI or a local (regional) church would have to carry the burden of double contextualization. While the phronetic approach to theology assists the local church to improvise the theo-drama in their everyday situations, it also gives the local church (regional theatre) an opportunity to be in connection with the universal church (master/creedal theatre), so that their contextual theology is compatible with a canon sense and catholic sensibility. In fact, Vanhoozer's emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit through the ecclesial interpretive community gives hope to the local church of being credible in their theological formation. The function of the creedal and confessional church constantly monitors the credibility of the contextual theology of the local church. Yet, in the actual outworking of this theological formation, it is very possible that the theological responsibility held by the universal, confessional and local churches will become one sided in nature. This would result in the local church simply becoming a receiving entity, creating a gap and power structure between these three levels. Vanhoozer does not give enough directions on how the doctrinal and social boundaries can be transcended between the creedal, confessional, contextual theatre.

Third is prophetic. Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology allows the use of diverse conceptual tools (which implies religious conceptual tools as well) in addressing contextual concerns. The use of conceptual tools, and creativity with metaphors, are considered mediums to transpose the meaning of Scripture into a given context. This approach gives liberty to the local theologian and pastor to improvise the gospel with their local hermeneutical tools but with a prophetic guidance. Vanhoozer does not set a rigid technical, mechanical, propositional formula or metaphor for addressing contextual theology. Instead, he proposes a way forward (theo-drama) that requires performance in everyday situations. The researcher concurs with Ramachandra who observes that Vanhoozer's use of the drama metaphor has a significant relevance in a postcolonial context.[568] Also, not being tied to one set of technical formulas or conceptual tools for addressing contextual concerns also avoids immediate labelling of Vanhoozer's theology as imperialistic. Since, we are in the last unscripted scenes of Act 4 (according to Vanhoozer), compiling formulas or sets of principles as a script would be against the very nature of the conclusion of Act 4 of theo-drama. This factor gives liberty

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[567] John Dayal, "There is nothing illegal in evangelisation," interview by Vicky Nanjappa, accessed March 24, 2015, http://m.rediff.com/news/slide-show/slide-show-1-interview-with-john-dayal-on-christians-feeling-secure/20120116.htm.

[568] Vinoth Ramachandra, *Subverting Global Myths: Theology and the Public Issues Shaping Our World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2008), myths of postcolonialism, Kindle version.

with prophetic guidance to the church to improvise Scripture according to everyday situations, while prioritizing the overall story of the Bible. While improvising theo-drama, the script (Scripture), creedal (unseen church), and denominational theatre (seen church) prophetically minister to a local church when it confronts particular situations with the Word of God, and enforces covenant blessing and responsibilities of theo-drama.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has contributed to the main investigation of the research by showing the ways in which Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theory contributes towards a theology which is contextually relevant to the Indian context, while faithfully upholding the Reformed authority of Scripture?

Therefore, at the outset of the chapter, the investigating question asked was: In what way does Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theory address hermeneutical and contextual challenges and to what extent does he succeed in continuing the tradition of a Reformed view on Scripture? Accordingly, the chapter first tested Vanhoozer's reframed hermeneutical theology of Scripture. Does Vanhoozer's reframed theology of Scripture adequately fit within the tradition of a Reformed doctrine of Scripture? This chapter concludes with the affirmation that Vanhoozer's reframed theology of Scripture, which moves beyond traditional Reformed views on Scripture, satisfactorily fit within the tradition of the Reformed doctrine of Scripture.

Our second criterion for evaluation was: How is Vanhoozer's Theological hermeneutics a relevant proposal for addressing contextual challenges? Based on the research, the chapter affirms that Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology has pertinently and adequately addressed the hermeneutical and contextual challenges posed both by modernity and postmodernity.

Hence, the investigation of this chapter concludes that Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theory pertinently addresses hermeneutical and contextual challenges by remaining within the vision of the Reformed doctrine of Scripture even when moving beyond a traditional Reformed vision of Scripture.

CHAPTER THREE

AN ANALYSIS OF THE HERMENEUTICAL THEOLOGY OF VANHOOZER OVER AGAINST THE AFRICAN HERMENEUTICS OF BEDIAKO, WITH RESPECT TO ITS POTENTIAL WITHIN A MULTI-RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter studied the question, "To what extent does Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology address hermeneutical and contextual challenges, and to what extent does he succeed in expanding a Reformed view of Scripture while addressing these challenges?" The purpose of this chapter is to test Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology against Bediako's African hermeneutics which was formulated within a multi-religious context. Therefore, the research question is, "To what extent does an interaction with the African hermeneutics of Bediako confirm, contradict or improve Vanhoozer's hermeneutical model, especially with respect to its potential to interact within a multi-religious context? The research question of the chapter contributes to the main investigation of the dissertation, that is, "In what ways could Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theory contribute towards a theology which is contextually relevant to the Indian context, while faithfully upholding the Reformed vision on the authority of Scripture? Consequently, the outcome of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, the primacy of Scripture in the African hermeneutics of Bediako in a multi-religious context. Secondly, an assessment of Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology with Bediako's hermeneutics especially within a multi-religious context. The method of the study will be both descriptive and analytical in nature.

The chapter will be divided into five sections. The first and second sections will describe the rationale and formation of Bediako's African Christian theology: Methodology. The next section will describe the authority of Scripture in Bediako's hermeneutics amidst a multi religious context. The fourth section will test hermeneutical theology of Vanhoozer using hermeneutics of Bediako, which is focussed on the authority of Scripture within a multi-religious context. This will be done by constructing a 'virtual' theological dialogue between them that includes two way traffic between their thoughts. Not only will Vanhoozer be approached from the perspective of Bediako but Vanhoozer will also in turn be used to interact with Bediako. This is helpful to deepen their theological and hermeneutical encounter. After that the evaluation and conclusion will be narrowed down to the actual guiding question of the chapter. The chapter will culminate by summarizing the findings.

3.2 Rationale And Formation of Kwame Bediako's African Christian Theology

Until the 19th century Africa was written off by the West as only a mission field, and only Western mission agencies were consulted for mission enterprises in Africa. Through the rise of Black Theology and African Christian theology, Africa experienced a paradigm shift in theology. The existing theological paradigms were that African traditions have no connection with the Christian faith, that there was no compatibility between the Gospel and the African traditional way of life, and that Christianity was not able to address the socio-economical and political issues in Africa.[569] The new paradigm aroused roaring theological debates worldwide. In the late 1950s, Black theology focussed on integrating the political and social struggles of the African peoples. In the 1980's, African Christian theology emphasized integration of the African pre-Christian past into African Christianity to ensure the identity and selfhood of African Christians.[570] Kwame Bediako was one of the pioneering theologians who endorsed the ground breaking new paradigm of 'the integration of African pre-Christian past and African Christianity in African Christian theology.' Bediako says that now, Africa is known not merely as a mission field for the West, but for the African theologians, missionaries, and pastors who have contributed immensely in various capacities, not just in Africa, but also worldwide. Furthermore, Bediako emphasizes that the center of gravity of Christianity now has shifted from the Western world to Asia, Africa and Latin America.[571]

3.2.1 A brief life sketch of Kwame Bediako

Manasseh Kwame Dakwa Bediako was a Ghanaian scholar, who explored new directions for African Christian theology with the aim to put Africa on the worldwide map of theological discourse. He was born on July 7, 1945. He died on June 10, 2008, following a serious illness. Mary Gillian, the wife of Bediako, described Bediako, in his funeral service, as a "Man of God, Visionary, Inspirer, Builder, Theologian, Scholar, Teacher, Husband and Father who served God and His people in Africa," notes Asamoah Gyadu.[572] Bediako earned two doctorates, the first one in French literature from the University of Bordeaux, and the second from the University of Aberdeen in the Department of Religious Studies. Andrew Walls observes that until his first doctorate in France, Bediako was a confirmed atheist and during his time in France, he underwent a radical Christian conversion.[573] He further recalls that the conversion of Bediako was so deep-

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[569] Ayoola. T Bernard, "The Contributions of Kwame Bediako to the Development of African Christianity" (M.Th Thesis, Grand Rapids, MI, Calvin Theological Seminary, 2010), 1–2.

[570] Kwame Bediako, "Understanding African Theology in the 20th Century," *Themelios* 20, no. 1 (October 1994): 14, http://s3.amazonaws.com/tgc-documents/journal-issues/20.1_Bediako.pdf.

[571] Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh/Maryknoll, NY: Edinburgh University Press/Orbis Books, 1995), 253.

[572] Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Bediako of Africa: A Late 20th Century Outstanding Theologian and Teacher," *Mission Studies*, no. 26 (2009): 9–10.

[573] Andrew. F Walls, "Kwame Bediako 1945 to 2008," in *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*, accessed September 20, 2013, http://www.dacb.org/stories/ghana/bediako_kwame.html.

seated that he wanted to discontinue his studies in favor of evangelism.[574] After his conversion, Bediako was grappling with African contextual elements which were not part of the theological agenda of the evangelicals in Africa. For instance, Bediako was curious to know the extent that the continuity of his ancestor god, *Onyankopon* could be integrated in the African Christian faith.[575] Moreover, Bediako was saddened by the fact that several realities of African life were left untouched by Christ and by African theology. This was due to the fact that African theology borrowed hermeneutical elements from the West which did not interface with the African distinctive.[576] Bediako was grieved by the fact that the Christian conversion was seen only as an introduction to a new God who had no connection to the African past.[577] Such hermeneutical issues led Bediako to both his second doctorate in African Christian theology and also starting a theological institution. After finishing his second doctorate, Bediako, along with his wife, pursued this hermeneutical challenge by starting the Akrofi-Christaller Centre for Mission Research and Applied Theology. This institution was later called the Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture. The goal of this institution has been to focus on scholarship and training, which focuses on the amalgamation of theological issues, African identity and selfhood. Walls' tribute to Bediako states the significance and the legacy of Bediako. Walls observes,

> He [Bediako] did perhaps more than anyone else to persuade mainstream Western theologians and mainstream Western theological institutions that African theology was not an exotic minority specialization but an essential component in a developing global Christian discourse.[578]

It should be mentioned that Bediako's family came from a Presbyterian background. His ecclesial affiliation to the Presbyterian Church was rebuilt once he returned to Ghana, and increases the credibility of making him a dialogue partner with Vanhoozer in this research project. However, it is beyond the scope of this research to get detailed information about his Presbyterian connections. Not much has been written about Bediako's connection with a Presbyterian church, other than a few pieces of information about his ordination. Walls mentions that Bediako's grandfather was a catechist and evangelist in a Presbyterian Church. When Bediako returned to Ghana to serve at Christian Service College, Kumasi, the family links with the Presbyterian Church were rebuilt and he was accepted for ordination in the Presbyterian Church.[579]

Bediako engaged theologically with Reformed and Presbyterian scholars worldwide. His theological topics illustrate his passion for integrating Reformed theology in Africa. He gave several lectures at Calvin Theological Seminary, USA. The topics he presented were, Vernacular Scripture in an age of Globalization: The African Dimension, Scripture as vernacular and the birth of

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[574] Andrew. F Walls, "Kwame Bediako and Christian Scholarship in Africa," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 32, no. 4 (October 2008): 189.

[575] Quarshie B.Y., "The Bible in African Christianity," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 14, no. 2 (December 1998): 12.

[576] Walls, "Kwame Bediako and Christian Scholarship in Africa," 189.

[577] Kwame. Bediako, "Jesus in African Culture," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 17, no. 1 (January 1993): 55.

[578] Walls, "Kwame Bediako and Christian Scholarship in Africa," 193.

[579] Walls, "Kwame Bediako 1945 to 2008."

theology: some ramifications of Scripture translation in Christian history, Sola Scriptura: The Christian doctrine of Scripture as translatable: A recovery of our time, and Christianity, Islam, and the Kingdom of God: Rethinking their relationship from an African perspective.[580]

3.2.2 Factors behind Bediako's quest for African Christian Theology

As previously stated, the main reason behind Bediako's argument for African Christian theology was the fact that Africans were being stripped of their religious and cultural values by being Christians. Even worse, Africans were seen as cannibals and uncivilized. Mission was all about the *'remaking of a man in Africa'*.[581] Bediako vividly points out several other reasons underlying his frustration with Western missionary paternalism, which led him to argue for a thoroughly Christian, yet thoroughly African theology. In the first reason, Bediako mentions two distinct episodes where the African pre-Christian religious tradition was disparaged in a Western theological debate. The first episode was the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, in 1910, which described the pre-Christian religious tradition as Animistic, and concluded that the African religious tradition contained "no preparation for Christianity."[582] Bediako's observation about the conference is worth mentioning. Bediako notes that the scholar who coined the term 'animistic,' used by the conference, was not a religious person and had never been in contact with people who were so called 'animists'. Even worse, argues Bediako, the Edinburgh Missionary conference that delivered this statement on Africa, did not even have a single representative from Africa in the conference.[583] The consequences of this were a biased and paternalistic attitude to the emerging Christian communities in Africa. Unsurprisingly, critics vehemently rejected the value of African Pre-Christian religious tradition in Christian theology. The African critics called out this paternalistic treatment of pre-Christian African religious tradition/experience as misplaced, unwarranted and destructive towards African tradition.[584]

The second episode was the theological debate between Dietrich Westermann and Kenneth Cragg over a period of thirty years. In 1935,

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[580] Calvin Theological Seminary, "Lecture Calendar, 2001,2004," accessed September 7, 2016, http://calvinseminary.edu/resources/calendar/lecture-calendar/.

[581] This was clearly evident by the task of missionary presented by J.H Oldham and B.D Gibson, titled 'the remaking of man in Africa', in their most sensational book in the twentieth century. Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 201. For book detail, refer to: J.H Oldham and B.D Gibson, *Remaking of Man in Africa*, first edition (London: Humphrey Milford/Oxford University Press, 1931).

[582] World Missionary Conference Report of Commission IV, "The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religion" (Edinburgh & London: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1910), 24., in Kwame Bediako, "The Roots of African Theology," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 13, no. 2 (April 1989): 58.

[583] Kwame. Bediako, *Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience* (Akropong-Akuapem, Ghana: Regnum Africa, 2000), 3–4.

[584] Bediako, "Understanding African Theology in the 20th Century," 14. Bediako pinpoints two books, Okot p'Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship* (Kampala: East African Literature Bureau, 1970); Ali Mazrui, *The African Condition: A Political Diagnosis* (London: Heinemann, 1980).

Westermann in his Duff lecture argued against including African pre-Christian religious tradition while transposing Christianity. He argued, "… he [the missionary in Africa] has to admit and even to emphasize that the religion he teaches is opposed to the existing one and the one has to cede to the other. …Giving the new means taking away the old."[585]

The second reason which led to Bediako's quest for African Christian theology was the motivation and confidence he found in the legitimacy and usefulness of the pre-Christian African experience, something that was greeted with astonishment in the 20th century. Bediako describes the significance of Africa in the 20th century in one word: "SURPRISE". Unlike the 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference, when the 'Africa' missionary conference met in Le Zoute, Belgium, the surprise factor of the conference was that the missionary movement was now more sanguine about the African religious past. It was now reflecting on, and learning from, its African experience. In a further surprising twist, the conference also affirmed: "it has now become recognized that Africans have been prepared by previous experience for the reception of the Gospel and that their experience contains elements of high religious values."[586] Furthermore, post Le Zoute 1926, the amateurs laid the foundation for the new African theological enterprise. These men were of humble background and modest attainment.[587] Two of them were Robert Moffat, who had been an Englishman's gardener, and Johannes Christaller, the son of a tailor. Christaller, for example, raised the significance of the Twi Language (local language of Ghana) to a literary level. He offered the world the first real insights by connecting the expression of Akan Christian worship to the native language.[588]

The third reason for Bediako's curious inquiry for African Christian theology is the noteworthy work of missionaries commissioned by established African churches. These churches were not instituted by any western missionary agency. Bediako pointed out that the African Instituted churches began commissioning missionaries from Africa due to the frustration they had with European missionary paternalism and control.[589] For instance, Bediako shares the

[585] Dietrich Westermann, "Africa and Christianity," in *Duff Lectures, 1935* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 2. in Bediako, "The Roots of African Theology," 58 And after thirty years, during the lectures given at Cambridge University, Cragg countered Westermann's argument against the inclusion of African pre-Christian religious tradition in transposing Christianity in Africa. He vehemently argued, "On the contrary: it means harnessing its possibilities [i.e. of the old] and setting up within it the revolution that will both fulfill and transform it. For if the old is taken away, to whom is the new given." Kenneth Cragg, *Christianity and World Perspective* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1968), 57. in Bediako, "The Roots of African Theology," 58.

[586] E.W Smith, ed., *The Christian Mission in Africa: A Study Based on the Work of the International Conference at Le Zoute, Belgium, September, 14-26, 1926* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1926), 16. in Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 4.

[587] Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 4.

[588] N Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, 1835-1960* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1965), 55. in Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 5.

[589] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 204 Bediako points to the careers of William Wade Harris, John Swatson, Sampson Oppong, Joseph Babalola, Garrick Braide, in west Africa; of Simon Kimbangu in Congo/Zaire; of Isaiah Shembe in Southern Africa and several other dynamic African prophetic figures across the continent, a good number of whom were women. He adds that none of the mentioned missionaries were commissioned by a

story of William Wade Harris of Liberia, whom he addresses as prophet Harris. According to Bediako, Harris was the first independent African pastor, who worked for two years with minimal western missionary funds and control, and yet brought 120,000 adult West Africans to Christianity.[590] Moreover, the missionaries commissioned by the African instituted church were empathetic to the religious queries of the local people. They honoured these queries as genuine. They allowed the African traditional world-view to be influenced by the Bible in their own terms, by transposing them to the true God. This methodology was believed to be more effective.[591] For example, in relation to polygamy, Independent churches declared, "We believe that [as an African Church] polygamy is not a mortal sin: 1 Cor. 7:28, 36…" Yet, they continued to wrestle with the polygamy in the church and find further solutions. In contrast to this, the historical churches backed by western agencies, particularly the Presbyterian Church, clearly defined their position as against polygamy and continued to exclude the polygamist from participating in Holy Communion, without giving any substantial help.[592]

The fourth reason that boosted Bediako's search was theological discoveries during Scripture translation. Bediako argued that only the mother tongue has the power to speak to the people's heart, especially on matters related to religion. Bediako observed that the implications of Scripture translation were massive in Africa. It produced several theological breakthroughs. Bediako pointed out some of the implications of these breakthroughs. First, through the very act of Scripture translation, the focal categories of Christian doctrines such as God, Jesus Christ, creation, sin, etc. were translated into the African traditional equivalents. Second, the African pre-Christian religious experience was not only perceived as a valid means for divine revelation but also provided a language for local Christian expression.[593] Third, people realized that the God whose name was revered in indigenous languages in pre-Christian Africa, like *Onyankopon,* was found to be the God of the Bible. These crucial factors gave Bediako the confidence that the resources from an African pre-Christian past had the potential for theological articulation. Besides Bolaji Idowa and John Mbiti, Bediako specifically points to the work of Afua Gyan, better known as Afua Kuma. She was a traditional midwife from Ghana, who wrote prayers and praises in the Akan language, with an emphasis on the African primal religion.[594]

It may appear that the main objective for Bediako's intensive theological endeavor was to rebut Western misinterpretation for their hostile view towards pre-Christian religious tradition of Africans. However, on the contrary, Bediako's

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missionary society. They were disenchanted by the western missionary agencies, and yet their work played a significant role in the growth of churches in Africa.

[590] Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 85.

[591] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 63–64.

[592] Bediako, 66–67.

[593] Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 16.

[594] Bediako demonstrates this with a poem written by Kuma. He asserts that she experiences the presence and the power of Jesus in the course of the delivery of many babies. Kuma writes, "When you heed the things of God, you need not wear an amulet to make your marriage fruitful. A woman is struggling with a difficult labour. And suddenly all is well. The child, placenta and all, comes forth without an operation. He is the Great Doctor" Bediako, 9.

goal for African theology was to predict a paradigm shift in African theological discourse. He vehemently argues,

> The era of African theological literature as a reaction to Western misrepresentation is past. What lies ahead is a critical theological construction which will relate more fully the widespread African confidence in the Christian Faith to the actual and ongoing Christian responses to the life expression of Africans.[595]

3.2.3 Hermeneutical trajectories which influenced Bediako's search for African Christian identity

Bediako explicitly points out three hermeneutical trajectories which brought awareness of and nurtured his 'creative African evangelical theological tradition.' He affirms,

> As an African evangelical Christian of the twentieth century, my awareness that a creative African evangelical theological tradition can emerge from a serious engagement with the religious world of African traditional religions, as well as with the spiritual and intellectual problems which they pose, has been nurtured in three ways. The first has to do with … the work I did for my doctoral thesis, published as, *Theology and Identity*. …The second route to my conviction… has to do with observations made by Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos at the consultation on 'Christian dialogue with traditional thought forms'. …The third way to my conviction, accordingly, has to do with the new understanding of the primal religion of the world in the history and phenomology of religion.[596]

This section will briefly encapsulate the above-mentioned factors. The first hermeneutical trajectory is Bediako's PhD dissertation entitled *"Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and Modern Africa"*.[597] While researching non-Western Christianity in Africa, Bediako did not commence this research without a lodestar. His dissertation brought together Christian theologians from two eras, namely- the Greco-Roman world of the second century, and the post-Christian African world of the twentieth century. Accordingly, Bediako employed Tatian, Tertullian, Justin and Clement of Alexandria from the early period. From the modern period Bediako employed E. Bolaji Idowu, John Mbiti, Mulago gwa Cikala Musharhamina and Byang Kato. Bediako, in this research, studied the hermeneutical methods of two eras to provide sufficient scope and diverse voices to underscore the importance of the 'African identity' in African Christian theology. From the basis of his research, Bediako identifies sufficient evidence of continuity between pre-Christian past and African Christianity. Moreover, along with the continuity, it is significant to note that Bediako affirms a proper place for African Tradition Religion in African Christian theology.[598]

The second hermeneutical route is Archbishop Yannoulatos' article titled "Christian Dialogue with Traditional Thought Forms." A rather lengthy quote

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[595] Bediako, 9.

[596] Bediako, 34–36.

[597] Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992).

[598] Bediako, 293.

from Yannoulatos will support Bediako's curiosity towards his theological discourse. While talking on the topic of "growing into an awareness of primal world views," and his emphasis on the rightful place for primal religion in theological formulation, Yannoulatos asks,

> Have we offered the people of Primal world-views the best we have? Have we made available to them all of the twenty-century-old tradition of the Church, not least that of the first centuries when Christians lived in a comparable climate of primal world-views? Or have missionaries only tried to transplant the Christianity and the problems of the Western Europe of the 16th century onwards? Can it be true that, owing to these inadequacies, Christians from primal societies, as in Africa, were…forced to seek to rediscover in their traditional rites some vital elements of the religious experience—such as the sense of total devotion, of being cut to the heart, of deep symbolism, or of participation of the whole person in worship?[599]

Yannoulatos' hermeneutical investigation strengthened Bediako's observations from his previous research. The ancient Greek religion and Roman religions, variants of primal religions, were religious backgrounds to the New Testament, which, according to Bediako is of a similar nature to African Traditional Religion.[600]

The third hermeneutical point of departure for African Christian theology was Bediako's revised understanding of primal religions proposed by Turner in "The Primal Religions of the World and Their Study".[601] The revised understanding appreciates the significance of primal religion, which Bediako calls 'primal imagination'. Bediako points out Turner's research which brings forth the significant affinities between primal religions and Christian faith. The following succinct description will summarize Bediako's take on Turner's six-feature structure. The first feature is 'a sense of kinship with nature', where animals and plants, like human beings, are related to the universe and exist spiritually. Second is the feeling that human beings have both physical and spiritual limitations. Hence, a power beyond human beings is anticipated. Third is a belief that there are other transcendental powers, and these powers can be benevolent or malevolent. Fourth is the human beings' attempt to relate to these transcendental powers to seek their blessings and also to be protected from evil forces. Fifth is the perception about life after death. For Bediako, this feature points towards the belief in the ancestors' role in the afterlife in various primal religions. The final feature is a belief of an intermingling of the physical and spiritual worlds.[602] The reason behind Bediako's new appreciation for Turner's framework of primal religions is twofold. First, Bediako perceived that the primal religions are an indubitable component of the religious tradition of the world, including Christianity. The second is the significance of the sixth feature that conveys "the primal conception of the universe as a unified cosmic system, essentially spiritual,

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[599] Anastasios Yannoulatos, "Growing into an Awareness of Primal World Views," in *Primal World-Views–Christian Involvement in Dialogue with Traditional Thought Forms*, ed. John. B Taylor (Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1976), 75–76.in Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 36.

[600] Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 36.

[601] H.W. Turner, *The Primal Religions of the World and Their Study*, ed. Victor Hayes (Bedford Park: Australian Association for World Religions, 1977).

[602] Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 88. The following is the summary of Bediako's take on Turner's six-feature framework. .

that provides the real key to the entire structure."[603] Bediako, however, goes a step further by pointing out the significance of affinities between primal religions and Christianity in comprehending the nature of Christian faith itself, which Turner ignored in his argument.[604] Evidently, Turner's framework has enormous influence and potential in the formation of Bediako's theology which argues for the integration of primal religions and African Christian theology.

3.2.4 The existing hermeneutical proposals for an African and yet Christian theology in contrast to the proposal of Bediako

Bediako mentioned two polarizing hermeneutical proponents, namely the intellectuals and the theologians, who were searching for the validity of African traditional values. The first hermeneutical proponents were the African intellectuals, who criticized the African theologians for inhibiting African identity in African theology. The African intellectuals denied the pertinence or even ability of Christianity to integrate the spiritual elements of Africa's traditional past.[605] More so, since history is a vital aspect in formulating theology,[606] the African history of oppression, slavery and manipulation of African identity by the European Christians cannot be overlooked in their theological endeavor. Some of the prominent protagonists were Okot p'Bitek, Ali Mazurai, and Osofo Okomfo Damuah. The task of their movement was "deliberate universalizing of the traditional religion into an alternative to Christianity (and to Islam)…"[607] The agenda of the intellectuals was religious continuity, similar to the Christian theologians, but with an exclusive focus on the reconstruction of African Traditional Religions.

The second group was the African theologians, who were 'churchmen trained in the theological traditions of western Christianity.'[608] The prominent protagonists among many others were M'biti, Idowa, Mulago, Sawyerr, and Kato. These scholars were not questioning the Western missionary enterprise in Africa; rather, they were asking a significant question related to the quintessence of African Christianity. That is, "whether the churches as planted by the Western missionary effort could adequately come to terms with the realities of African life, especially the still potent realities of the traditional religions and their world-views."[609] Having planted churches in Africa, the missionary enterprise continued to consider Africa and African realities as superstitious, savage, inferior to Europe, and primitive. Hence, the African theologian's persistent approach was indigenization by Christianization of the religious past. Bediako calls the promoters of this approach as indigenisers, translators and biblicists.[610] While acknowledging the task of African scholarship to rehabilitate the African identity

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[603] Bediako, 89.

[604] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 96.

[605] Bediako, 77.

[606] Bediako, 5.Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 226–27.

[607] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 4,77.

[608] Bediako, 76.

[609] Bediako, 76.

[610] Bediako, "Understanding African Theology in the 20th Century."

as genuine, he also critically responded to their methods. Bediako points out that approaches such as Idowu's, focussed on refining the old religions. His approach was radical continuity with the African traditional religions. Mulago's approach, on the other hand, was less radical. His approach focussed on refining old religions with a firm belief in the significance of the Christian gospel in Africa. Kato, however, proposed a radical discontinuity with African Traditional? Religions. He insisted on the centrality of the Bible for African theology without any synthesis of old and new. Still others like M'biti and Sawyerr took the middle path between these two radical approaches. They recognized the vitality of the African traditional religious heritage and the integrity of the African Christian experience in the formation of African theology. According to Bediako, this approach seemed to offer the most hopeful signs of integration without distorting the important content and at the same time translating the Christian faith into African terms. However, argues Bediako, the task of theology was not to 'indigenize Christianity or theology' but rather allow the 'Christian Gospel' encounters to be shaped by African experience.[611]

In the hermeneutical approaches listed above, African theologians persistently pointed out identity as a pertinent theological category that aimed at the indigenization of the Christian and the church. Bediako, however, was not convinced. He vehemently argues,

> The process [of African theology] was as much about rehabilitating African identity as it was about affirming a Christian commitment. … it seemed to be doing so with rather scant attention to what might be described as 'areas of traditional Christian doctrine' …[612]

Bediako labels the approaches taken by African theologians as the 'indigenization of the church by Christianization of the pre-Christian heritage' or 'Christianizing of African tradition'. He calls these approaches, a past, an era of African theology. And hence, he argues, the task of African theology has been renewed. Nonetheless, the previous era will continue to guide present African theologians to foresee the future.[613] The renewed task of Christian theology, argues Bediako, should be that "following the 'Christianization' of the African tradition, African Christianity must achieve an *Africanisation* of its Christian experience…"[614] Hence, Africanisation of the Christian experience should address and ask: How can African Christianity, with the help of Christian tools, reconstruct a distorted African identity and take African theology forward to 'a fuller and unfettered African humanity and personality?'[615] Consequently, the new approach should read the Scripture for an 'African apprehension of Christ'. Bediako proposes,

> Such a reading of the Scriptures will take seriously the African religious apprehension of Christ on the African world that is going to inform the new African theology, answering to the challenges to show the relevance of faith in Jesus Christ at the roots of African existence and humanity.[616]

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[611] Bediako, 16–17.
[612] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 81.
[613] Bediako, 82.
[614] Bediako, 4.
[615] Bediako, 5.
[616] Bediako, 83.

Consequently, the hermeneutical agenda of Bediako, for the task of an African and yet Christian theology is strikingly and vividly articulated in his two seminal works, namely, *Theology and Identity: The impact of culture upon Christian thought in the second century and modern Africa,* and *Christianity in Africa: The renewal of a Non-Western Religion.* These titles irrefutably enunciate Bediako's quest for the 'IDENTITY' of Christians in Africa, that is, the impact of African traditional heritage in Christian theology.

Bediako's proposal foresees various challenges to the new treatment of theology. First, the African theological construction would need to earn the confidence of the Christian communities of faith while offering a distinctly Christian response to the actual life of African Christian communities.[617] Second, the task of this renewed theology should be relevant to the people of Africa and yet without syncretism.[618] Third, the resources for this renewed task laid out for African Christian theology have to come from the continuing help of academic discipline from African history.[619] Bediako anticipates a preponderance of resources from African history: such as the oral theologies found in the grassroots of African Christian communities; the resource found in prayer, worship, celebration patterns, testimonies of the wonders of God in local languages, and the realization of Jesus Christ in their own religious ideas. All these resources will have 'roots in the continuing realities of traditional primal world-view'.[620]

3.2.5 Evaluation of Bediako's methodology

Although Bediako stresses the African Christian identity against the western suppression of it in African theology, he does so having been influenced by western thought and education (University of Aberdeen) and western theologians (Harold W. Turner, Andrew Walls). Bediako, thus, calls his proposal different from other African theologians, both in method (intellectual, social and religious grounds) and in result.

The researcher considers Bediako's insistence of African identity and selfhood in African Christian theology genuine, and yet perplexing. It is a genuine quest because with the disparaging mission methods that came from the west, African Christians were deprived of using their language, cultural and religious expressions to worship God. Bediako's passion and burden for this mission is clear. Yet, his search is puzzling because several fundamental questions have been left unanswered. Some glaring examples are: Where does the African identity actually lie? What constitutes and perpetuates African identity? Bediako acknowledges the attempts of African theologians and affirms the significance of their approach in recovering African identity, and yet rejects their proposal as mere 'Christianizing African tradition,' because it is simply based on resolving religious problems.

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[617] Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 57 A similar concern has been presented by Bediako in one of the manifestos. Cf. Kwame Bediako, "The Significance of Modern African Christianity- a Manifesto," *Studies in World Christianity* 1, no. 1 (1995): 58.

[618] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 85.

[619] Bediako, "The Significance of Modern African Christianity- a Manifesto," 55.

[620] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 85–86.

In response to these omissions, a few questions must be posed. Is not religious identity an integral part of African tradition? Besides, are not both approaches, Christianization and Africanization, involved in the same theological endeavor? Mauleke rightly critiques the juxtaposition between Christianizing and Africanizing, that it is too strict a division.[621] When Akan believers pray to Jesus as an ancestor, how would believers know whether they are Christianizing the African tradition or Africanizing the Christian experience?[622] Bediako does not sufficiently clarify how the African identity is best recovered by the Africanization of Christian experience. The proponents of 'Christianizing African tradition', (be it radical continuity, middle path, radical discontinuity), are involved in Christianizing African culture in order to make it adaptable to Christianity, yet Bediako does not articulate the limitations of their approaches. Bediako's example of the limitations in their approach is perplexing, and in some cases, inconsistent. For example, Bediako is not satisfied with the theology of ancestors proposed by Pobee. The reason given is that it is based on Akan wisdom sayings and proverbs and not based sufficiently on religious nature and biblical revelation.[623] On the other hand, Bediako applauds the contribution of Kuma's personal poems. Bediako calls this grassroots theology.[624] He observes that Kuma's poems express her experience of the presence of Jesus in her profession as a midwife. The research raises several questions which arise out of Bediako's quest. How does oral tradition such as this, perpetuate African identity? Which African traditional elements authentically retrieve African identity? In a similar line, Bediako approves the contribution of African independent churches in continuing with African identity. He, however, does not clarify how his method moves beyond their theological discoveries in a search for African identity. Furthermore, in retrieving African Christian identity, Bediako rejects the proposal by the African intellectuals (as discussed above) because they were universalizing the African traditional religion. If Bediako was interested in retrieving African Christian identity, should not this approach be seen as the most authentic because they are in the business of universalizing the African identity without even being distorted by any religion? Again, how would the African Christian identity be different from mere African identity? Bediako outrightly rejects the proposal of the intellectuals, though they are clearly correct in pointing out the African history of oppression and slavery under Christianity, whose message and method were incongruent with African identity. While Bediako argues for African identity based on intellectual grounds upon which to validate African credentials, he has totally missed out on the equality, justice, and material/economic/social credentials.[625] Balcomb has a similar observation. He says that the African

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[621] Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, "Half a Century of African Christian Theologies: Elements of the Emerging Agenda for the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 99 (1997): 12.

[622] Maluleke, 12.

[623] Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 24. Kwame Bediako, "Biblical Christologies in the Context of African Traditional Religions," in *Sharing Jesus in the Two Thirds World: Evangelical Christologies from the Contexts of Poverty, Powerlessness, and Religious Pluralism*, ed. Vinay. Samuel and Chris Sugden (Grand Rapids, MI.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1984), 100.

[624] Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 8,12.

[625] Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, "In Search of 'The True Character of African Christian Identity'. A Review of the Theology of Kwame Bediako," *Missionalia* 25, no. 2 (August 1997): 217; Anthony O. Balcomb, "Narrative, Epistemological Crisis and Reconstruction - My Story with Special

Christian theologians, this applies to Bediako as well, have seldom spoken about 'ethnicity, political corruption, the environment, and the role and status of women.'[626] Was this oversight deliberate, so that Bediako could differentiate his approach from black theology? Another significant factor observed by Benno van den Toren in Bediako's methodology is for not giving an equal emphasis on the discontinuity between the Gospel and the African traditional religions and its value in African Christian theology.[627]

Having discussed the rationale and formation of Bediako's hermeneutical quest for African Christian theology, the next section will deal exclusively with the primacy of Scripture in Bediako's hermeneutics of African Christian theology.

3.3 The authority of Scripture in Bediako's Hermeneutics amidst multireligious context

After his conversion, Bediako was eager to investigate how his Akan God *Onyankopon.* whom he knew during his conversion, could be fully known as the God of the Bible, who is the creator and sustainer of the world. African theologians affirm that for Bediako, the Bible became a source for theology, along with the African Traditional Religion, in his search for answers. In fact, both, in his personal theological journey and in his ministry as counselor, Bediako treasured the wealth of Bible.[628]

Hence, the purpose of the present section is to describe and study the authority of Scripture in Bediako's hermeneutics amidst multi-religiosity. The projected hermeneutical route along with the authority of Scripture by Bediako has potential to further engage with Vanhoozer in developing a Reformed hermeneutics in the midst of a multi-religious context. Bediako's engagement with Vanhoozer to further develop Reformed hermeneutics amidst multi religiosity will be analyzed in the next section.

3.3.1 The use of images and metaphors for the primacy of Scripture in Bediako's hermeneutics

Bediako uses several images and metaphors to signify the primacy of Scripture in his search for African Christian theology. Some images and metaphors that are used are a prism, a record of God's engagement with culture, a

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Reference to the Work of Kwame Bediako," *Scriptura* 97 (June 12, 2013): 58, http://scriptura.journals.ac.za/pub/article/view/713.

[626] Balcomb, "Narrative, Epistemological Crisis and Reconstruction - My Story with Special Reference to the Work of Kwame Bediako," 57.

[627] Benno Van den Toren, "Kwame Bediako's Christology in Its African Evangelical Context," *EXCHANGE -LEIDEN-* 26, no. 3 (1997): 223.

[628] B.Y., "The Bible in African Christianity," 12–13; Watson Omulokoli, "Kwame Bediako, a Deeply Christian Scholar, and the Implication of His Example," in *Seeing New Facets of the Diamond: Christianity as a Universal Faith: Essays in Honour of Kwame Bediako*, ed. Gillian M. Bediako, Benhardt Y. Quarshie, and Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2014), 87–88.

road map, a story, history, and a basis of our identity.[629] Two images used by Bediako are worth elaborating on. The first image is that of a prism. Scriptures are typically compared to spectacles or viewed as the lenses of our faith by the church fathers. This image presumably denotes that the Scriptures evaluate the culture.[630] But instead of spectacles and lenses, Bediako uses a prism to explain the function of Scripture. He argues, "When light passes through a prism, a rainbow of colours is revealed. Similarly, when our cultures pass through the prism of Scripture, we see them in a new way. The light and shade intrinsic to our cultures are revealed."[631] The Scripture is seen as a prism shedding new rays of light to culture and tradition in Africa. This image implies that the centrality of Scripture is fundamental in portraying a fresh dimension to African culture and identity, unlike the quintessential missionary methods where the Scriptural texts were used as lens or spectacles to evaluate and demonize African culture.[632] The implication of this image can be seen in the interpretation of understanding of the place of ancestor in African society. When Scripture talks about the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ into the realm of spirit-power; these virtues portray Jesus as an Ancestor, the supreme Ancestor.[633] This portrayal of Jesus as the Ancestor and not just the Saviour is seen as a function of the Bible as a prism.

The second of Bediako's metaphors worth further exploration is that of the Bible as story. Bediako's perception of Scripture as our story is well pronounced in his hermeneutics. For Bediako, Scripture is not just text but also context, where a reader participates. He proposes, "Scripture is not just a holy book from which we extract teaching and biblical principles. Rather, it is a story in which we participate."[634] Bediako explains this metaphor by responding to Mostert, who enunciates the Christian faith as based on the stories of God in both the Old and the New Testament. Bediako responds,

> My question is: Is it enough to characterize the Scripture as 'stories told about God?' … Is it possible, therefore, that we should think of the Scripture also as *our* context*, in which we participate and share? If we are to go to the Scripture for our 'fundamental inspiration,' in that they are 'stories told about God,' then they can also be seen to be *our* stories too, so that they become the hermeneutics of us, our stories, and our communities… indeed, our life in the world?[635]

Bediako further argues that a reader participates in Scripture through their belief

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[629] Kwame Bediako, "Scripture as the Interpreter of Culture and Tradition," in *Africa Bible Commentary*, ed. Tokunboh. Adeyemo (Nairobi and Kenya/ Grand Rapids, MI: WordAlive Publishers/ Zondervan, 2006), 7–8.

[630] Vanhoozer uses lens metaphor for the Bible which is used to evaluate culture. Vanhoozer observes, "… the loss of the ability to 'read' our world through the interpretive biblical lens of God's word." Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The Drama of the Christ: The Gospel as the Thing Done and Word Made," 6, http://www.wheaton.edu/~/media/Files/Centers-and-Institutes/BGC/Roundtable/2008/2008-Session-3-Vanhoozer.pdf.

[631] Bediako, "Scripture as the Interpreter of Culture and Tradition," 7.

[632] Bediako, 7.

[633] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 217.

[634] Bediako, "Scripture as the Interpreter of Culture and Tradition," 7.

[635] Kwame Bediako, "The Catholicity of the Church and the Universality of Theology: Comments on Christiaan Mostert's Paper," in *Christian Identity in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, ed. M. E Brinkman and D. van Keulen (Zoetermeer, Netherlands: Uitgeverij Meinema, 2003), 200–201.

in the Gospel, in the Holy Spirit and the communion of saints. In Christ, a believer is adopted and connected to the Abrahamic lineage. Through this participation, Scripture has become their story, that is, the story of a believer's struggle in trusting God. There are times when a believer is faithful in obeying God, and there are occasions when a believer fails and worships other gods. This participation now sheds new light on their reading and interpretation of the Scripture.

The new dimension of the Scriptures can be felt through the translation of Scripture in vernacular languages. Bediako points out that it is possible that a reader may bring their own cultural world of meaning with them to participate in the Scripture.[636] Bediako substantiates this argument by stating an example of William Wade Harris's participation in Scripture. It is an example of participation through a trance-visitation of Harris, who lived in the twentieth century and was able to participate in spiritual conversation with Moses, Elijah, and the Angel Gabriel. Bediako confirms Harris' message after his trance-visitation, as based on the Bible.[637] Bediako is correct in categorizing the message of Harris as biblical because the message itself was about God's goodness, shunning the idols, belief in Jesus, being baptized, and the second coming of Christ. However, more than the biblical message that came through this trance-visitation, Bediako's focus is on the participation through trance-visitation which gives credibility to the Bible as the word of God. In a participation such as this, the Scripture is illumined through primal imagination. Bediako confirms the primal ways of participating with the Scripture as valid, and describes such appropriation of the Bible as 'participation in' the truth, and not 'belief in' the truth.[638] Now, through primal ways of participation, the cultural and religious traditional stories assist in illuminating the Christian Scriptures and vice versa, argues Bediako.[639] Hence, African experiences and insights are considered important elements in understanding and interpreting the Scriptures.

A significant aspect of the participation with the Scripture, Bediako notes, is that over a period of several generations, the culture and the Scripture gradually fuse into one. Bediako argues, "Scripture and culture are like merging circles, gradually coming to have one center as we increasingly recognize ourselves in Scripture and Scripture becomes more and more recognizable as our story."[640] Bediako calls these merging circles "natural" (African culture) and "adoptive" (participation in Scripture), which merge as the story of a reader, or as a narrative of an individual or a society. Bediako exemplifies this with a diagram. The researcher has reworked the diagram to label Bediako's description. For the

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[636] Kwame Bediako, "Biblical Exegesis in Africa: The Significance of the Translated Scriptures," in *African Theology on the Way: Current Conversations*, ed. Diane B. Stinton (London: SPCK, 2012), eBook format.

[637] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 92.

[638] Bediako, "Biblical Exegesis in Africa: The Significance of the Translated Scriptures," eBook format.

[639] Kwame Bediako, "The Emergence of World Christianity and the Remaking of Theology" (Grand Rapids, MI: Nagel institute, Calvin College, 2007), 11, https://www.calvin.edu/nagel/resources/files/KwameBediako_2007Lecture.pdf. Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 407.

[640] Bediako, "Scripture as the Interpreter of Culture and Tradition," 8.

original diagram, see 'Scripture as the interpreter of culture and tradition.'[641]

Adoptive

Natural

our story
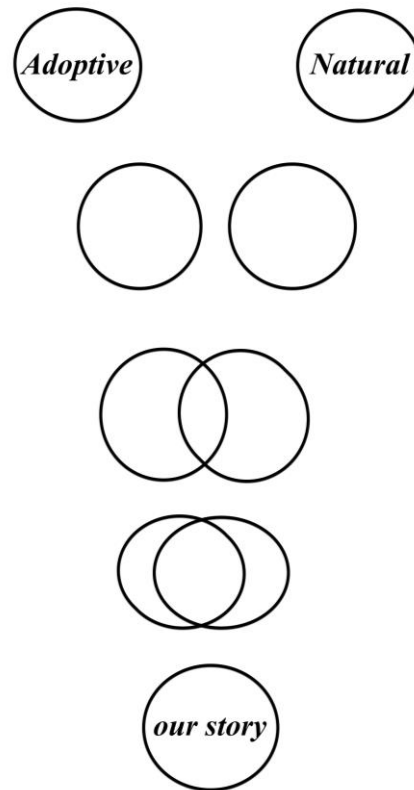
Bediako further clarifies the concept of mutual engagement, in his diagram. Through this diagram, Bediako suggests that after the merging of adoptive and natural culture, the Scriptures become the African story in the African context.

3.3.2 Bediako-Kato dialogue: The nature of the Scriptures

In the discussion pertaining to sources of theology, both in systematic theology and in the contextual trends in theology, a discussion on the primacy of Scripture is inevitable. Bediako too, grappled with this significant aspect of theology. The doctrine of Scripture was of paramount importance to Bediako, so much so that he set aside a whole chapter in his PhD dissertation to dialogue on this subject with Byang Kato, an African theologian.[642] Kato's *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*[643] is known to be his most noteworthy contribution. Although Bediako considers Kato's insistence on the primacy of Scripture to be a significant contribution to African Christian theology, he did not hesitate, however, to call his

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[641] Bediako, 8.

[642] A Variety of African Responses: Byang Kato, or Theology as Bibliology I. The emergence of a dissenting voice. Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 386–425.

[643] Byang Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* (Kisumu, Kenya: Evangel publishing house, 1975).

theology problematic for African Christian thought. He labeled it 'Biblicist principle',[644] and antithetical in relation to the Gospel and African culture.[645] The goal of this section is not to simply rehearse the debate, or evaluate Kato but to highlight important factors which will assist the research in comprehending Bediako's arguments for the primacy of Scripture.

Kato was critical of new trends in theology that minimized the centrality of Scripture in theology. He labeled new trends in theology, such as Liberation theology, Black Theology, and other theological trends in Africa as situational theology. Kato believed that the prominence given to contextual/situational concerns diverted from the absolute teaching of Scripture.[646] The use of other sources apart from Scripture in the new contextual/situational trends in theology implies that the other sources are in equal standing with the Bible, of which Kato vehemently disapproved. Kato argues that other sources apart from Scripture, such as nature, created universe, human conscience and universal primeval history portrayed in the early chapters of Genesis, are simply general revelation. Special revelation, however, is sufficiently clear and final in the Christ-event alone.[647]

If Kato defines the absolute authority of the Bible as inerrancy, Bediako understands the authority as the trustworthiness of the Bible. Bediako disapproves Kato's definition of general revelation as natural revelation, a hint about the Supreme Being, a pointer to the creator, and a dim light of general revelation. Yet more worrisome for Bediako was Kato's view that general revelation was without any salvific value, and without the possibility of an 'accurate perception of divine truth'.[648] Bediako's disappointment with Kato is apparent after Kato bypasses an 'explicit Scripture declaration' on the credibility of general revelation in knowing God. Kato agrees that any cultural practice or concept could be included in Christianity as long as it is compatible with the Christian faith.[649] It is interesting to note that Bediako categorizes Kato's thesis as 'traditional protestant Reformed' theology. In line with the main research question, a question arises, does Bediako, through this label, hint at his differences with the Reformed understanding of Scripture?

Bediako criticized Kato for minimizing the content of the Bible into not just 'the basic source', but fundamentally the 'only subject matter' of theology.[650] Bediako blames Kato for safeguarding the Bible so much so that he did not even appreciate the significance of the Bible beyond the absolute biblical incidents or elements.[651] The example of this can be seen in relation to the translatability of Scripture. Kato protected the absolute biblical content of the Bible from being changed or translated to the point that he preferred to explain the foreign terms instead of substituting them with more appropriate terms of a local language. Take for example, a mustard seed. For Kato, if a mustard seed is not present in a

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[644] Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 415.
[645] Alan Thomson, "Bevans and Bediako: Reconsidering Text-Based Models of Contextual Theologising," *ERT* 33, no. 4 (2009): 352.
[646] Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 395,398.
[647] Bediako, 400.
[648] Bediako, 400–401.
[649] Bediako, 412.
[650] Bediako, 398.
[651] Bediako, 404.

particular context, it should be explained rather than substituting it with a local grain or a seed.[652] Moreover, while taking cultural contexts and the Bible into theological formulation, a mode of expression should be focussed upon, and not the content. The expression of theology in African terms can be done through music, musical instruments, local language and church architecture. For Kato, the authenticity of expressions should be such that 'African Christians' will be enabled to remain 'Christian Africans'.[653] The Bediako-Kato debate suggests that Bediako departed from Kato and gave importance not just to the Bible, but also to the African Christian experience and African traditional religions in translating and interpreting the Bible. For Bediako, the uniqueness of Christianity should be the eternal word: Jesus Christ and not just the primacy of Scripture.[654]

Bediako further develops his argument on the nature of Scripture by referring to his understanding of the Gospel. He says that the Gospel is complete when it is understood comprehensively, that is, in all human dimensions such as cultural, social and religious categories. And evangelization, therefore, is the conversion/rehabilitation of culture or a discipling of the nations and not just a replacing of the culture. Replacing the culture, for Bediako, is proselytism.[655] Therefore, this comprehensive understanding of the Gospel entails an 'understanding of the Scriptures as a whole'.[656] Bediako argues that Christian affirmation of this comprehensive understanding should not be formed by the content of other religious faiths, let alone be based on their sources.[657] Kevin L. Howard suggests that Bediako's stand on the Scripture is similar to Kraft's, who also assumes that special revelation continues beyond the Bible. Howard points out, "Bediako likewise left the door open wider for God's revelation than Scripture would allow. He worked with the same weakness in this theology that Kraft did."[658] **Is Howard's critique valid?** An answer to Howard's critique will be sought in the following section which examines the credibility of other religious sources in Bediako's hermeneutics.

3.3.3 The Bible and other religious sources

Kato rejected African theological trends because he thought the use of African sources other than Scripture would grant them equal authority with Scripture. What is the place of sources other than Scripture in Bediako's hermeneutics? Bediako lauds Padilla's hermeneutical circle which takes an "open-ended reading of Scripture with a hermeneutics in which Gospel and culture

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[652] Bediako, 409.

[653] Bediako, 400.

[654] Bediako, 398.

[655] Kwame Bediako, *Sola Scriptura: The Christian Doctrine of Scripture as Translatable - A Recovery of Our Time*, MP3 (Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, MI, 2001), https://internal.calvinseminary.edu/calendar/lectureCalendarWP.php/?search_fields=&search_targ et=&search_dates=&search_month=&search_day=&search_year=&search_compare=before&arch ive=1&sort_column=date&sort_direction=a.

[656] Kwame Bediako, "What Is the Gospel?," *Transformation* 14, no. 1 (March 1997): 1.

[657] Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 37.

[658] Kevin L. Howard, "Kwame Bediako: Considerations on the Motivating Force Behind His Theology and Identity," *Global Missiology* 3, no. 10 (January 4, 2013): 8–9, http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/article/view/1186.

become mutually engaged in a dialogue."[659] Does mutual engagement mean equal standing? It is appropriate at this juncture, to first point out the nature of religious sources other than the Scriptures in Bediako's hermeneutics. Unlike Kato, Bediako labels the Bible as incarnate and other sources as pre-incarnation, rather than general and special revelation, the traditional terms used by theologians. The assumption behind the usage of the terms seems to be the anticipation of the pre-incarnated work of Christ in African traditions. Bediako argues, "We have got the Scripture, the incarnation which has taken place." And now we know Christ, which was articulated differently in the pre-Christian existence.[660] This implies, that the source of doing theology is definitely revelation about Christ, however, it is expressed in African culture before Christianity as the pre-incarnation of Scripture, and after Christianity as the incarnation of 'the Scriptures'.[661] Hartman argues that for Bediako, theology has to be in equation with the sum total of Gospel and the Culture.[662] Hence, a variety of cultural elements become significant sources for theology. Apart from the Scriptures, the salient means of the pre-incarnate work of Scripture are knowledge of God in ATR, grassroots theology (oral theology expressed in the writings of lay people), and continuation of the revelation in the African Christian experience of Christ.

It is vital to briefly mention these sources. The first source is revelation in ATR. The reasons are self-explanatory for why Bediako finds comfort in the reassurance of the modern African theologians who argue that ATR had a genuine knowledge of God, even if expressed and communicated in contextual terms. Similar support comes from the result of the translation of the Scriptures. The translatability of Scripture confirmed ATR not just as a 'valid carriage of the divine revelation' but also as a cultural 'idiom for Christian apprehension' of God.[663] It was not surprising, however, for African people to realize that the God, *Onyankopon,* they had been worshipping in their indigenous languages in ATR happened to be the God of the Bible.[664] Bediako argues, "African Traditional Religion has been a serious preparation for the Gospel in Africa and forms the major religious substratum for the idiom and existential experience of Christianity in African life."[665]

Since the mutual engagement of ATR with Scripture is considered crucial, a quick mention of ATR is in order. Bediako himself does not seem to define ATR, per se. Bediako uses various terms such as pre-Christian past, African traditions, African religiosity, African cultures, and primal religions interchangeably, without specific precision, to refer to ATR. But he does interact with a few scholars who have written about ATR, such as Harold Turner,

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[659] Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 407.

[660] Bediako, "Biblical Christologies in the Context of African Traditional Religions," 116.

[661] Bediako finds his support in Tutu, who writes, "… It is reassuring to know that we have had a genuine knowledge of God and that we have had our own ways of communicating with deity, ways which meant that we were able to speak authentically as ourselves…"Desmond Tutu, "Whither African Theology?," in *Christianity in Independent Africa*, ed. Edward Fasholé-Luke (London: Rex Collings, 1978), 366. in Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 2.

[662] Timothy M Hartman, "Revelation, Religion, and Culture in Kwame Bediako and Karl Barth" (PhD Thesis, Virginia, University of Virginia, 2014), 61.

[663] Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 16.

[664] Bediako, 16–17.

[665] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 82–83.

Geoffrey Parrinder, Edwin Smith, Johannes Christaller, and Patrick Ryan. Despite a lack of definition, while formulating an African Christian theology, he certainly interacts with a few elements of ATR: a belief in a Supreme Being, beliefs in spirits and divinities, ancestors, the use of magic, charms and spiritual forces etc. He observes that any religion that shares these same characteristics of African traditional religions should be seen as Primal religions.[666] Thus we can infer that Bediako classifies ATR as a Primal religion. Accordingly, Bediako writes:

> [African primal religions are] far from being 'passive traditional cosmologies', [but] have, in fact, been dynamic institutions, able to adapt and respond to new situations and human needs in society. Indeed, African primal religions have been shown to have 'founders and proselytisers and converts and prophets…' and it even becomes possible to explore a 'salvation-history within them.[667]

Hence, ATR is a primal religion, and primal religions, according to Bediako, are 'both primary and prior' which constitute a comprehensive history of mankind.[668] The abiding presence of primal world-views in relation to "thought patterns, perception of reality, concepts of identity and community, ecological equilibrium, and justice" are essentially religious in nature. Bediako calls this primal imagination.[669] Bediako argues that this primal imagination is present not only among the followers of primal religious systems like ATR, but with Christian believers alike.[670] This means that ATR is the *substratum* of Christianity. Hence, the vitality, congruency and translatability of ATR in Christian tradition are immanent. It is precisely for this reason Bediako claims that the religious and spiritual elements of ATR are vital in forming the cultural background of most African Christian faith traditions.[671] Bediako's perception of ATR, now leads him to assume the certainty of God's witness in ATR. His assurance of God's witness in ATR is seen in his disappointment with European missionaries who thought otherwise.[672] Bediako notes,

> In failing correctly to apprehend and follow the apostolic precedent in their understanding of African 'heathenism', our modern missionaries, by the same token, deprived themselves of the means of recognising and articulating the universal nature and activity of Christ among the 'heathen' they encountered.[673]

It is noteworthy, however, that the apostolic precedent which Bediako is referring to, is the content of the apostolic preaching. He argues that the apostles, with equal conviction, preached Jesus as the fulfillment to both Jews and Gentiles. The Jews found fulfillment in Jesus Christ through the promises of the Old Testament and gentiles through their 'deepest religious and spiritual aspirations.'[674]

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[666] Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 36.

[667] Terence O. Ranger and I. N Kimambo, eds., *Historical Study of African Religion-With Special Reference to Central and Eastern Africa* (London: Heinemann, 1972), 2f. in Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 212.

[668] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 105.

[669] Bediako, 105.

[670] Bediako, 93.

[671] Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 36.

[672] Howard, "Kwame Bediako: Considerations on the Motivating Force Behind His Theology and Identity," 3.

[673] Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 245.

[674] Bediako, 245.

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The second source Bediako employs, other than Scripture, is oral theology[675] expressed in the writings of lay people.[676] Oral theology depicts African Christian theology in its true form because it comes from where the faith lives, in a setting of pervasive forces and mysterious powers,[677] the lived African Christian experience. Hence, the theological task for Africa's academic theologian is to consider oral theology and elucidate its significance in African Christian theology.[678]

The third source is the role of prophets/prophetesses and ancestors in Bediako's source of theology. A case in point are the examples of Harris, (mentioned earlier), and a prophetess in Kagoro. The fact that Bediako criticizes Kato for not giving due credit to the prophetess, who through spirit-possession predicted the future arrival of 'white people' (missionaries) in Kagoro, unveils the important role he gives to prophets and prophetesses as an African source of theology. This suggests that the religious means of divine communication in ATR are more than just 'weak clues' in Bediako's theological framework.[679] It also means that the role of ancestors in revelation cannot be avoided. It should be mentioned that Bediako's theology of ancestors does not give ancestors an equal place with Jesus Christ nor does he expect a revelation independent of Jesus Christ. However, Bediako expects, or rather hopes that the ancestors may, if God so desires, give a message to their people. Of course, this is only possible if God so desires and allows, because God knows that the people would only listen through the ancestors.[680] Bediako's desire to hear from his ancestors, though ambiguous, shows that he expects revelation apart from the Scripture.

The fourth source is the emphasis on the 'informal' expression of Christian presence, or the actual life of African Christian communities. Bediako in his manifesto on the significance of modern African Christianity argues that since literature cannot completely circumscribe the depth of African Christianity, due emphasis should be placed on the lived experience of African Christians in their total religious, cultural, as well as socio-political contexts.[681] The credibility and adequacy of Scripture is compared with the African Christian experience in answering contemporary prosaic and theological queries. Bediako asks, "What use

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[675] Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 17 Oral theology, suggests Bediako, should neither be perceived as an opposite term of Academic nor written theology, nor considered to be the theology of the non-illiterate. Instead, it should be seen as a transition process which would eventually would find a place in written theology. Hence, it will then become a real theology. He, however, defines oral theology as a theology which is formed in the life-situation of the community of faith.

[676] Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Kwame Bediako and the Eternal Christological Question," in *Seeing New Facets of the Diamond: Christianity as a Universal Faith: Essays in Honour of Kwame Bediako*, ed. Gillian M. Bediako, Benhardt Y. Quarshie, and Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2014), 50.

[677] Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 8.

[678] Bediako, "The Roots of African Theology," 64.

[679] Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 388–89.

[680] Bediako, "Biblical Christologies in the Context of African Traditional Religions," 115.

[681] Bediako, "The Significance of Modern African Christianity- a Manifesto," 58. Kwame Bediako, "African Theology as a Challenge for Western Theology," in *Christian Identity in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, ed. M. E. Brinkman and D. van. Keulen (Zoetermeer, Netherlands: Uitgeverij Meinema, 2003), 62.

is made of the Scriptures in resolving problems in daily life? Does the use of the Scriptures relate to the well-known African inclination towards seeking guidance for living and making decisions?"[682] Bediako further emphasizes the values of the African Christian experience through which various Christological categories were explored. He says Christological categories such as Christ as Healer, as Ancestor, or as Master of Initiation in African theological exploration are derived from African Christian experience and their apprehension of Transcendence within ATR. These categories are explored by various African theologians, such as J.S. Pobee, B. Buzo, A.T Sanon, R. Luneau, and C. Nyamiti. Bediako anticipates more Christological themes based on African Christian experience which will have vital significance in Africa, far greater than merely employing an abstract concept.[683] Gyadu affirms Bediako's emphasis on the use of African experience in theological formation. He says that Bediako's theology was an outcome of his personal faith and interaction with the life and work of Christ. He observes, "Kwame Bediako's Christology was born out of both personal and contextual experience as an African."[684] Although Raymond Potgieter and Christopher Magezi call Bediako's emphasis on African experience in theology cultural trapping, they affirm: "He [Bediako] seems to follow the Evangelical doctrine of Christ's incarnation, yet introduces Jesus Christ in African cultural trappings."[685]

3.3.4 The nature of primacy of Scripture in the translatability of Scripture

Gyadu notes Bediako's significant observation about the African representation at the day of Pentecost (Libya and Egypt), who heard God's wondrous work in their own native language. Bediako was convinced that God wanted Africans to hear of God's wondrous work in African mother-tongues.[686] Bediako's thesis for the translatability of Scripture has been that if Christ's incarnation can be translated, so can the Word of God.[687] The present section deals with the nature of the primacy of Scripture in Scripture translation and theological formulations. Bediako credits the drive for Scripture translation to the modern missionary movement from the west.[688] He describes the history of modern mission as the history of Scripture translation. In the matter of religions, he argues that only the mother tongue has the power to speak to the minds and hearts of the people. He, in fact, considers Christianity's importance given to all-languages as a unique achievement of Christianity.[689] The implications of Scripture translation were massive in Africa. This Scripture translation produced theological formulations. The secret for this result lies not so much in the intellectual excellences in the African religion but in the essence of the Christian faith itself,

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[682] Bediako, "The Significance of Modern African Christianity- a Manifesto," 58.

[683] Bediako, 59.

[684] Asamoah-Gyadu, "Kwame Bediako and the Eternal Christological Question," 40.

[685] Raymond Potgieter and Magezi Christopher, "A Critical Assessment of Bediako's Incarnational Christological Model as a Response to the Foreignness of Christ in African Christianity.," *In Die Skriflig* 50, no. 1 (2016): 1–9, http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ids.v50i1.2136.

[686] Asamoah-Gyadu, "Kwame Bediako and the Eternal Christological Question," 53.

[687] Asamoah-Gyadu, 49; Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 32.

[688] Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 81.

[689] Bediako, 32.

that is, in the 'infinite cultural translatability' of the Gospel.[690] Bediako points out some of the implications of Scripture translation. First, through the very act of Scripture translation, the focal categories of Christian doctrines such as God, Jesus Christ, creation and sin were translated into the African religious and cultural equivalents. Second, the importance of Scripture translation points to the legitimacy of African pre-Christian religious experience, not just as a genuine means for the divine revelation, but also for providing language as the local Christian expression to understand Christ.[691] Third, people realized that the God whose name was revered in indigenous languages in pre-Christian Africa such as *Onyankopon,* was found to be the God of the Bible.[692] Fourth, through translation, people received access to the original source of Christian revelation, which is now facilitated by the local religious terminologies and ideas. Fifth, through African indigenous terms and ideas, the Africans recognized Jesus Christ the Lord by faith, and not by theology invented by missionaries.[693] Bediako and Sanneh are two significant theologians who have contributed to the importance of the translatability of Scripture.[694] In fact, Bediako draws from Sanneh while arguing for the translatability of Scripture.[695]

What is the nature of the primacy of Scripture in translated Scripture? Bediako affirms Sanneh's argument that the translated Bible continues to be fundamentally and significantly equal to what it was in its original form. This is possible only due to the incarnation of Christ. Just as the historical manifestation of Jesus Christ was made relevant throughout history, similarly the Word of God through local religious idioms and concepts (translation) found its true destiny throughout history.[696] The translated Bible remains essentially and substantially equal to its original autograph because the local religion provides cultural idioms to understand Christian belief.[697] Bediako confirms Sanneh's argument to the point that he regards African religious idioms as having an underlying layer of vital Christian consciousness.[698] Without the translation, Bediako considers the Bible to be an abstract Word of God finding its destiny in local culture.[699]

3.3.5   Jesus Presented as the Supreme Ancestor, par excellence in Akan context.

How does Bediako maintain the primacy of Scripture and yet use ATR elements in formulating a theology which Africanizes Christian theology? To answer his question, this section will study Bediako's theology of Jesus as the

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[690] Bediako, 16.

[691] Bediako, 16.

[692] Bediako, 16.

[693] Bediako, 16–17.

[694] Asamoah-Gyadu, "Kwame Bediako and the Eternal Christological Question," 52.

[695] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 109–23. Sanneh Lamin, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, 2nd edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009).

[696] Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 109.

[697] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 120.

[698] Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience*, eBook format (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, Regnum Africa, 2004), African theology-A feeling after new Languages? eBook format.

[699] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 121.

Supreme Ancestor, par excellence. Before stating Bediako's theology of ancestor, a few traditional and dogmatic theology examples will be reviewed. These will show the difference from Bediako's formulation of theology of ancestor by maintaining the primacy of the Scripture. As stated earlier, Bediako is not satisfied with previous attempts by traditional, and dogmatic Christological formulation. This is due to the fact that the theological formulations were done on a superficial level, without sufficiently employing the Bible. The first example Bediako gives is an African traditional example. Bediako points to Pobee's suggestion, which perceives similarities between the Akan and the Jewish world and looks at Jesus as the Greatest Ancestor. Jesus is seen as an ancestor, because "in Akan society the Supreme Being and the ancestors provide the sanctions of the good life, and the ancestors hold that authority as ministers of the Supreme Being."[700] Bediako expresses discontent with this formulation because Pobee used Akan wisdom sayings and proverbs, but did not address the religious nature of the question sufficiently. The second example is a dogmatic formulation. Bediako also interacts with two western formulations on the idea of ancestors. He refers to Fasholé-Luke's proposal from a traditional western theological formulation in the article titled 'Ancestor veneration and the communion of saints. This formulation of Jesus as ancestor is based on the doctrine of communion of saints. Fasholé-Luke attempts to incorporate the African idea of ancestors by including them in the present-day church's fellowshipping with the holy people of all ages through partaking in the holy sacrament.[701] Bediako finds Fasholé-Luke's view useful but limited because it does not address the fundamental questions. Fasholé-Luke's formulation does not take into account the fact that the ancestors in the past had also been anticipating the grace of God. This formulation is more like a prayer about the dead. Bediako regards this notion as "receiving sacrament on behalf of the dead, prayers for the dead, and pleading for the salvation of the dead."[702] Moreover, this view is built on the premise of a confession based on predefined theological datum and not on African consciousness.[703] The third example Bediako points out is from Fortes who has attempted another western theological formulation. He perceives the notion of ancestor veneration as ancestor worship, and incongruous to a western understanding of the immortality of the soul.[704] Fortes explains,

> The Western notion in this regard assumes 'a kind of law of the conversation of entities in a total universe made up of two complementary regimes, a regime of nature and the regime of deity. By this reckoning, souls are indestructible essences that animate bodies

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[700] John S. Pobee, *Towards an African Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 94., in Bediako, "Biblical Christologies in the Context of African Traditional Religions," 100.

[701] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 224.

[702] Bediako, 224.

[703] Bediako, 224 Parrat, however, applauds Fasholé-Luke's view. Parrat affirms that this theological formulation claims to avoid the dangers of both "syncretism and spiritual schizophrenia". He further lauds Fasholé-Luke for providing genuine doctrine of the communion of saints which will be acceptable to the universal church and satisfying to African Christians. John Parrat, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), 96–98.

[704] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 218.

and succeed them in the timeless realm of God, pending resurrection in a corporeal form.'[705]

Bediako critiques Fortes' view to be based on the western notion of "sharp dichotomies between the realm of secular and sacred— the 'regime of nature' and the 'regime of deity'"[706]

Bediako, on the contrary, claims to offer a fresh look at the belief in the Ancestor which Africanizes the Christian experience. A short description of the significance of ancestors in the Akan worldview will put Bediako's fresh look into perspective. At the outset, it should be noted that Bediako is aware of the fact that there are various views on ancestors in African traditional religion, some of which are idolatrous, and some of which sharpen our focus on the truth.[707] To describe the belief of ancestor, Bediako invokes Pobee's understanding of ancestors, and calls it genuine. Bediako recalls,

> …[Ancestors], like the Supreme Being, are always held in deep reverence or even worshipped. The ancestors are that part of the clan who have completed their course here on earth and are gone ahead to the other world to be elder brothers of the living at the house of God. Not all dead are ancestors. To qualify to be an ancestor one must have lived to ripe old age and in an exemplary manner and done much to enhance the standing and prestige of the family, clan or tribe. By virtue of being the part of the clan gone ahead to the house of God, they are believed to be powerful in the sense that they maintain the course of life here and now and influence it for good or ill. They give children to the living; they give good harvest, they provide the sanction for the moral life of the nation and accordingly punish, exonerate or reward the living as the case may be.[708]

Before explaining what Bediako's theology of ancestors is, it is crucial to note what his theology of ancestors is not. Bediako vehemently defends his theology of ancestors. His theology is not concerned with the fate of the ancestors who did not know Christ and were not part of the church. Although these factors are integral to being Christian, Bediako is not concerned about the fate of the ancestors in these respects because he firmly believes that the saving grace of God was not absent before the historic proclamation of the Gospel.[709] Also, ancestors are not rivals of Christ.[710] Bediako argues,

> Rather, a theology of ancestors is about the interpretation of the past in a way which shows that the present experience and knowledge of the grace of God in the Gospel of Jesus Christ have been truly anticipated and prefigured in the quests and the responses to the Transcendent in former times, as these have been reflected in the lives of African people.[711]

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[705] Bediako, 218; Meyer Fortes, "Some Reflections on Ancestor Worship in Africa," in *African Systems of Thoughts*, ed. Meyer Fortes and G. Dieterlen (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 122–41, http://lucy.ukc.ac.uk/era/ancestors/fortes2.html.

[706] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 218.

[707] Just like in Christianity, where there are diverse views in every pre-Christian tradition, some which guide us towards Christ and can be handmaids to the Christian purpose, and some which distract us from Christ. As previously mentioned, Bediako calls pre- Christian traditions traditions of response to the work of the Holy Spirit. Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 41.

[708] Pobee, *Towards an African Theology*, 46.in Bediako, "Biblical Christologies in the Context of African Traditional Religions," 99.

[709] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 224.

[710] Bediako, 218.

[711] Bediako, 224-25.

Accordingly, Bediako's framework of theology of ancestors' rests on the universality of Christ, and consequently our adoptive past, based on the primacy of Scripture. He explains that the Bible presents Christ as universal, and His uniqueness consists in this universality.[712] Bediako affirms that he reads Scriptures keeping in mind the Akan traditional piety with the goal to bring Christ to Akan reality.[713] Bediako argues that the Bible affirms the universality of Christ, Christ as the savior of all nations, for all human beings, and in all times.[714] Consequently, through faith-union in Christ, we become 'the seed of Abraham and heirs according to the promise' (Galatians 3:29), which makes us 'heirs together with Israel or members of one body' (Ephesians 3:6). Bediako goes on to explain that in Christ, we receive 'our adoptive past' through the 'Abrahamic link', thus connecting our past, that is, all the departed souls or ancestors, with the entire past of the people of God. Moreover, this understanding of the Bible paves the way for an African appropriation of the Scriptures.[715] Therefore, the lives of all the biblical ancestors like Adam, Eve, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, David and others have played a significant role for the subsequent generations, including us, and our ancestors. More pointedly,

> So we too must have had our fathers and mothers, ancestors who like biblical ancestors, at critical points in their lives and career, made choices which went into shaping the destinies of our traditions till in the fullness of time our histories became merged, in Christ, with the history of the people of God.[716]

Moreover, Jesus Christ, after the resurrection and the ascension, has gone to the realm of the spirit. This signifies that Jesus is gone to the realms of ancestor spirits, and the gods. This assures us that He is now the Lord, reigning chief, Supreme ancestor, over the spirits and gods, over the living and the dead and ancestors too, who are referred to as the living-dead. That is, Bediako's theology of ancestors means to show that Christ "by virtue of his Incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension into the realms of spirit-power, can rightly be designated, in African terms, as Ancestor, indeed Supreme Ancestor."[717] Hence, the source of power, resources for living, harmony in personal and communal life, protection from evil powers, comes from Christ alone.[718] This implies that previous ancestors are cut off as the means of blessing. Now the place of ancestors is trimmed in social organization. They are simply members of the community. And as such they are often included in the communal intercession, which is an extension of the filial relationship, and is seen as respect for elders. Christian tradition and Scripture affirm this filial relationship.[719] Bediako goes a step further in describing the continuous relationship with ancestors. Bediako explains that if God so desires, ancestors could also speak to their people. Since Jesus knows that ancestors are significant to the society and people will listen to them, Jesus will

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[712] Bediako, "Biblical Christologies in the Context of African Traditional Religions," 116; Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 24.
[713] Bediako, "Biblical Christologies in the Context of African Traditional Religions," 100–101.
[714] Bediako, 101.
[715] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 227.
[716] Bediako, 227–28.
[717] Bediako, 217.
[718] Bediako, "Biblical Christologies in the Context of African Traditional Religions," 99–115.
[719] Bediako, 115.

convey the message from the ancestors to society. This is based solely on Christ because society now completely depends on Him, and has to be open to let Christ work in His ways.[720]

Bediako's theology of ancestor integrates both the Gospel and ATR. In the Gospel: Universality of Christ, his resurrection, and continuity of the Bible; and ATR: the role of Ancestor in African religious tradition.

3.4 An analysis of Vanhoozerian hermeneutical theology through Bediako's Hermeneutics in a multi religious context with an emphasis on the Authority of Scripture

Until this section, this chapter has dealt with the primacy of Scripture in Bediako's African hermeneutics in the multi-religious context of Africa. The present section will now deal with the second part of the chapter. The purpose of this section is to assess Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology against Bediako's African hermeneutics within a multi-religious context. The assessment will investigate how Bediako's hermeneutics within an African multi-religious context will confirm, contradict and/or improve Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology. When it comes to engagement with both modernity and postmodernity, there are several similarities between Vanhoozer and Bediako which have led them to each argue for their respective hermeneutical routes. It is beyond the scope of this research to discuss the contextual similarities between them. While analyzing or testing Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology against Bediako's African Christian Theology, the section will focus on the primacy of Scripture amidst multi religiosity.

3.4.1 The significance and vitality of translated scripture

Bediako, while affirming Sanneh's argument for the translatability of Scripture, vehemently emphasizes the equality of translated Scripture with the original autograph, both fundamentally and significantly. Furthermore, he contends that without the translation of Scripture, the Bible is an abstract Word of God, without finding its destiny in local culture. To be precise, Bediako affirms, "Translation assumed that the abstract Word of God would find its true destiny when embodied in concrete local idiom…"[721] Bediako seems to argue that it is only when the abstract original autograph is translated into the local language that it communicates the redemptive work of God in Jesus Christ. He goes a step further by favoring local religious idioms not just as a vehicle of revelation, but also endowing them with salvific values.[722] There are two hermeneutical issues with the translatability of Scripture that emerge from this argument: biblical ontology and continuation with other religions. First, Bediako's hermeneutics confirm and improve Vanhoozer's biblical ontology. The dichotomy, that is

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[720] Bediako, 115.

[721] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 121.

[722] Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 109; Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 120,121.

'*being* and *becoming*', in Bediako's ontological argument, about Scripture becoming God's word in translated Scripture can be understood in Vanhoozer's speech-act theory. Bediako's ontological contention of becoming confirms Vanhoozer's speech-act philosophy and Ricoeur's definition of discourse. Speech-act and discourse define speech as when a speaker is doing something in and by speaking. The communication in speech-act is not just imparting information but communicating a proposition. Vanhoozer argues, "Theology must come to grips with the Bible as performative rather than simply informative discourse."[723] This implies that the original autograph is God's Word because it really imparts the knowledge of the redemptive work of God. Yet, the Bible also becomes God's Word in translated Scripture when the African illumined readers receive the Bible and comprehend the redemptive work of Christ by grace through faith. In Vanhoozer's words, "the full measure of Scripture as a communicative act of God, then, involves the-spirit-testifying-about-Jesus-through-Scripture-to-the-church."[724] Simply put, the Scripture is divine discourse, the truth about the redemptive work of Christ in Scripture is present in the canon, the original autograph (Being); yet translated Scripture becomes God's Word when a reader is illumined by the Holy Spirit (Become). Hence, Bediako confirms Vanhoozer's speech-act theory contention, because the Bible becomes God's Word in translated Scripture when the Holy Spirit's illumination helps a reader to "acknowledge the plain sense for what it is and follow its illocutions and perlocutions where they lead."[725] However, Bediako goes against Vanhoozer when he considers the original autograph to be abstract in contrast to Vanhoozer who affirms the original autograph (canon) to be God's Word even when it does not find its destiny in a particular context.

Second, Bediako's hermeneutics affirms Vanhoozer's hermeneutical trajectory of the continuity of biblical ontology with local culture/religion concepts. Vanhoozer argues that when cultural terms are employed for translation, they should be 'sanctified' by redefining their meanings from their 'new biblical frame of reference'.[726] He refers to the example of Logos, which was a cultural concept, redefined and contextualized within the drama of redemption. Vanhoozer uses several secular concepts, metaphors, and theories of language to explain the ontological aspect of Scripture, the redemptive work of God in Christ, and improvisation of the drama in a local context. Vanhoozer employs several words which are not English words in his book *The Drama of Doctrine*. A few of them are *scientia, sapientia, habitus, theoria, technē, phronesis et al.* He often informs the reader about the connection of his hermeneutics with the philosophies, conceptual tools and its source. Vanhoozer mentions the names of Austin, Searle, and Shakespeare who have influenced his theological formulation. Specifically, time and again in his work, Vanhoozer connects Shakespeare's plays to the drama

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[723] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 64.

[724] Kevin J Vanhoozer, "A Person of the Book? Barth on Biblical Authority and Interpretation," in *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology: Convergences and Divergences*, ed. Sung Wook Chung (Milton Keynes, Bucks, UK/Grand Rapids, MI: Paternoster/Baker Academic, 2008), 57.

[725] Vanhoozer, 57.

[726] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 321.

of Scripture.[727] However, Vanhoozer mentions the connection in the metaphor for the sake of relevance to secular society, but does not emphasize any continuity with the origins of the concepts nor the tools of drama, as Bediako does with his context.

Bediako's hermeneutics also attempts to provide a link missing in Vanhoozer's articulation of biblical ontology and continuity. He steps beyond Vanhoozer by strongly emphasizing the continuity of YHWH's redemptive work in the Akan spirit world in translated Scripture.[728] A strong example discussed earlier is, Jesus, who is perceived as a Supreme ancestor, par excellence. Although Bediako follows the Vanhoozarian principle of redefining/sanctifying the terms, in this case he does so by emphasizing its continuity with the religious elements rather than its discontinuity. Bediako neither qualifies the level and quality of continuation of other religious values, nor does he qualify which salvific values continue when using ATR elements in Bible translation. Wagenaar rightly points out Bediako's under emphasis of the discontinuity of the Gospel with the religious context. Wagenaar notes that the religious continuity Bediako argues for within other religions is rather abstract. He writes, "It is surprising to notice that, given the rather massive language on "continuity" in the work of Bediako, his actual reflection on continuity and discontinuity remains rather abstract and does not come down to earth."[729] The major difference between borrowing sources from secular and religious contexts is the inevitability of identifying continuation and contradiction in the religious terms, much more than the secular ones. Admittedly, translation of Scripture is more complex when one deals with other religious concepts within contextualization. Bediako affirms Vanhoozer who says that the Church grows when its faith is translated into new languages and cultures. It is surprising, however, that Vanhoozer mentions only culture, language and identity within secular society as the postmodern shifts in contextual theology.[730] Disappointingly he misses the religious turn in the postmodern shift which is the burning question within the densely religious context of the southern hemisphere. Bediako improves this missing link in Vanhoozer's hermeneutical examples.

3.4.2 The place of translated Scripture and the linguistic performance of the ecclesia: the interpretive community

The translation of Scripture in Africa is an act of, or the performance of, the African Church. As stated earlier, the original autograph (Scripture) is perceived as abstract unless translated into a local context. Bediako, however, calls translated Scripture the original autograph, both in relation to its essence and substance. Bediako affirms, "The centrality of Scripture translation points to the significance of local religions for providing the idiom for Christian

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[727] Vanhoozer, 248.

[728] Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 22–24.

[729] H. Wagenaar, "Theology, Identity and the Pre-Christian Past : A Critical Analysis of Dr. K. Bediako's Theology from a Frisian Perspective," *International Review of Mission* 88, no. 351 (1999): 368.

[730] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), Ebook.

apprehension."[731] Does that suggest that Bediako is naming the interpretive authority, that is, the African Church, as the initiator of the meaning of Scripture? Are the resources of ATR a principal interpretive authority, or is the authority in addition to the canonization of Scripture? Simply put, does the linguistic performance of the African Church (interpretive community) amount to giving meaning to the canon, the inspired Word of God? Bediako writes, "If it is translatability which produces indigeneity, then a truly indigenous church should also be a translating church, reaching continually to the heart of the culture of its context and incarnating the translated Word."[732] Bediako's contention seems similar to Lindbeck's cultural linguistic approach, which insists on the importance of language deciding the meaning, and the use of Scripture in the church (African), and not Scripture in-itself (abstracted Word of God).[733] In Bediako's hermeneutical route, the African church (who translates Scripture), becomes the 'First theology', to use Vanhoozer's expression. Bediako's overemphasis on the local church as an interpretive community in deciding the meaning of Scripture is contrary to the role Vanhoozer's hermeneutics gives to the Church. Vanhoozer labels this approach a kind of anthropology or ethnography. Vanhoozer, moreover, questions the authority of the local church in assigning meaning to the canon. Vanhoozer asks if Christian identity is received through the biblical text, or if it is produced in and by the translation performance of the interpretive community?[734] The tension here seems to be between the canonical script and the linguistic performance of a local church. Vanhoozer does not downplay the performance of the church, but vociferously affirms that it must take place within a Christian interpretive framework: Ecclesial triangulation. In Vanhoozer's hermeneutical scheme, ecclesial triangulation should corroborate with canonical triangulation. Vanhoozer defines canonical triangulation as the work of a human author's communication interaction with the redemptive work of God and the Holy Spirit leading the human authors to truly understand the wondrous work of God.[735] And, Ecclesial Triangulation is articulated in this way: "The Spirit ministers reality – the truth of creation made new in Jesus Christ-through the inspired biblical discourse to the church in the world today."[736] The importance laid by Bediako on the African church in illuminating the meaning of Scripture fits within canon and ecclesial triangulation. However, the emphasis is laid more on the interpretive community, with the Holy Spirit guiding the African church to illuminate the meaning of the inspired Word of God. Bediako differs from Vanhoozer by placing more emphasis on translated Scripture by the African church. Vanhoozer, without denying the importance of the linguistic performance of the church, combines it with ecclesial triangulation. Both, Vanhoozer and Bediako have emphasized the performance of the church in translation. However, Bediako seems to underscore the interpretive effort of the African church whereas

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[731] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 120.

[732] Bediako, 122.

[733] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "On the Very Idea of a Theological System: An Essay in Aid of Triangulating Scripture, Church and World," in *Always Reforming: Explorations in Systematic Theology*, ed. A. T. B McGowan (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2007), 142 remarks in parentheses is my emphasis.

[734] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 170.

[735] Vanhoozer, "On the Very Idea of a Theological System: An Essay in Aid of Triangulating Scripture, Church and World," 171.

[736] Vanhoozer, 172.

Vanhoozer triangulates the performance of the church in communicating the redemptive work of Christ through the Divine discourse. Vanhoozer warns against a Bediako-like ecclesial autonomy, as no language or culture can elevate itself to be the exclusive norm for the church; the canon has the sole rights as the norming norm.[737]

3.4.3 The role of religious terms/metaphors (prosaic) in translated Scripture

If a call to employ local idioms and metaphors in translation of the redemptive work of Christ in a local context is well pronounced by Vanhoozer, it is Bediako who improves on Vanhoozer by showing us how to execute this hermeneutical call. Bediako confirms Vanhoozer's hermeneutical call to employ local metaphors to clarify the authority of Scripture within that local context. Vanhoozer uses metaphors such as drama, theatre, maps, light and lens to develop the authority of Scripture. Bediako affirms Vanhoozer by employing similar metaphors such as story, prism, road map, a record of God's engagement with culture, and his history, to display the science of Scripture. Vanhoozer took drama and found hermeneutical parallels in almost every element related to theatre to present the Scripture's redemptive narrative as theo-dramatic redemption. For example, Vanhoozer in *The Drama of Christian Doctrine* compares and names equivalents to the major elements of theatre with the drama of redemption: The playwright: God, the drama: the history of redemption, the script: the canon of Scripture, the dramaturge: theologians, the director: the Holy Spirit, and pastors under him, the actors: all believers.[738] Bediako differs from Vanhoozer and instead uses the Bible as the African Story, but without finding theological equivalents for each element required to form a story. Bediako took a narrative approach instead of drawing theological equivalence. Bediako took the story metaphor in the context of cultural interactions of the Gospel in Africa: contextualization. Bediako writes, "since the significant cultural crossings of the Christian Gospel are taking place in the churches of the South, it is to these theatres of Christian interaction that we must turn for the reorientation that is needed for embracing the task of theology afresh in our time."[739] Bediako uses his theological acumen in relating the event of the redemption of Christ to his African cultural story/interaction: Jesus as Supreme Ancestor, par excellence.

For example, Bediako considers Jesus as a Supreme ancestor, a term which is religiously controversial and yet significant for the African believer to understand the work of Christ. Vanhoozer argues, "To translate into the vernacular is therefore to recognize the significance of the local idiom: the Prosaic."[740] Bediako affirms Vanhoozer's approach to prosaic theology who states that the prosaic approach to theology helps in bridging the gap between the

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[737] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 319.

[738] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*.

[739] Kwame Bediako, "Conclusion: The Emergence of World Christianity and the Remaking of Theology," in *Understanding World Christianity: The Vision and Work of Andrew F. Walls*, ed. William R. Burrows, Mark R. Gornik, and Janice A. McLean (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2011), Ebook format.

[740] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 320.

situations in the Bible and our situation (everyday life). Bediako improves Vanhoozer's approach by exemplifying it with a religious term. He says if a person whose mother tongue is not English, reads only the English version of the Bible, the person will not understand the significance of the redemptive work of Christ. Further, Bediako points to the annual purification ritual, the *Odwira* festival celebrated in Akan culture. He says that if an Akan reads the Bible (Hebrews 1:3) in the Twi language, the religious idiom *ODWIRA* is used to describe the redemptive work of Christ. An Akan believer will easily understand Jesus as their perfect *Odwira* who has completed the purification ritual for them once and for all. The religious concept in the Twi language is much more expressive than the English version.[741]

It is admirable how Bediako affirms and improves the Vanhoozarian hermeneutical route to employ prose in the translation of Scripture. Bediako redefines and reuses religious terms in contextualizing the redemptive work of Christ from the *Odwira* ritual. It is yet to be seen how Bediako sets boundaries to show discontinuity between the humanly initiated *Odwira* purification and that which is achieved in Christ. Although Vanhoozer does not give any examples of using religious idioms in theology, he however suggests a way forward to set the boundaries for discontinuity with other religions. He argues,

> Prosaic theology views contextualization not as the application of an already completed (Western) product but rather as the demand to do theology here and now, to speak and act fittingly in this particular situation, in dialogue with both Scripture (is it canonical?) and church tradition (is it catholic?).[742]

Vanhoozer is improved on by Bediako who, within the boundaries set by Vanhoozer, exemplifies how it can be done. With a prosaic approach to theology, Bediako affirms that Vanhoozer's hermeneutical route is flexible and organic, allowing a theologian to improvise within the boundaries of theo-drama. For instance, Vanhoozer's metaphorical scheme proposes: "*A genuine contextual theology is accountable both to the theo-drama (and hence to the canonical texts) and to the contemporary situation (and hence to particular cultural contexts).*"[743] Bediako's use of *Odwira* affirms the Vanhoozarian metaphorical scheme (theo-drama: the work of Christ), giving space to contextualize and yet follow the redemptive work of Christ in *Odwira*. Bediako affirms and improves Vanhoozer. For Bediako such improvisation confirms Vanhoozer's hermeneutical trajectory which seems to be organic but could be vulnerable when it comes to interaction with religions.

3.4.4 The primacy of Scripture and the use of contextual/extra-biblical terms in theology

Bediako's proposal of Jesus as Supreme Ancestor (an everyday Akan term) can be considered to fall nicely within Vanhoozer's argument for extra biblical

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[741] Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 33.
[742] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 321.
[743] Vanhoozer, 314.

terms in theology. Yet, this argument may not be the same as Vanhoozer's example of *homoousios* (an everyday Hellenic term) used in the doctrine of the Trinity. However, it does fall within Vanhoozer's argument for improvisation by using contextual terms in theology. Bediako affirms Vanhoozer, who has set examples for using extrabiblical words in theology. While Vanhoozer is the imaginative theorist, Bediako improves him in his ingenuity of execution. Vanhoozer commends the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity within the authority of Scripture. He calls this doctrinal formulation of the Trinity the 'evangelization of Hellenism' and not the 'Hellenization of the gospel'.[744] This is in contrast to Bediako's route. Bediako insists on the *Africanization of the Christian experience* (Hellenization of the Gospel) and not the *Christianization of the African experience* (evangelization of Hellenism).

Vanhoozer's hermeneutical trajectory endorses the redefinition of the Gospel in new cultures and languages and conceptualizes the way the Church defined the Trinity. However, in doing so, Vanhoozer asks a pertinent question: What are we doing to the Scripture while we redefine the Gospel?[745] Here Vanhoozer talks about continuity and discontinuity in using the Scripture in theological formulation. He says the approach should neither be replication: repetition of Scripture (this denotes too much sameness: continuity), nor innovation: departure from Scripture (this means too much difference: discontinuity).[746] To this end, Vanhoozer proposes dramatic improvisation because it preserves the sufficiency of Scripture and the sameness of the gospel. While commending the doctrine of the Trinity, Vanhoozer recalls the action of the council of Nicaea. The Council neither replicated, nor innovated, but rather improvised the concept of *homoousios,* (the same substance) in determining that Scripture ascribes to the Son the same substance as the Father.[747]

Bediako affirms Vanhoozer's hermeneutical proposal of theo-dramatic improvisation in his presentation of Jesus as the Supreme Ancestor within the Akan context. This hermeneutical effort signifies the use of extra biblical terms in theology that still gives primacy to Scripture. Vanhoozer's theology of improvisation comes into play within Bediako's theology of Ancestor. Generally speaking, it is clear that Bediako's theology of ancestors' rests on his dialogue with the work of Christ's redemption and African culture, rather than simply transporting the original concept, or the concept of Jesus as Saviour received from the missionaries. He does not merely borrow propositions on the work of Christ but looks into the bigger picture of redemption within the African context. Bediako follows Vanhoozer by being faithful in maintaining the redemptive play, preserving the nature of the triune God, and yet enriching the bigger picture of the work of Christ in a different way from other interpretations. Translating the drama of redemption for Vanhoozer is, "To continue the same evangelical drama in a new situation." Bediako translates the redemptive work of Jesus as Supreme

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[744] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Improvising Theology According to Scriptures: An Evangelical Account of the Development of Theology," in *Building on the Foundations of Evangelical Theology: Essays in Honor of John S. Feinberg*, ed. Gregg R. Allison and Stephen J. Wellum (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2015), Ebook format.

[745] Vanhoozer, Ebook format.

[746] Vanhoozer, Ebook format.

[747] Vanhoozer, Ebook format.

ancestor in the Akan context. Bediako's Akan idiom intends, "to show that Christ, by virtue of his incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension into the realms of spirit-power, can rightly be designated, in African terms, as Ancestor, indeed Supreme Ancestor."[748] What is being translated into the Akan context is ultimately the theo-drama: Jesus works as Supreme ancestor par excellence in Akan culture. This seems to be a genuine model of dialogical action, as proposed by Vanhoozer.[749]

The following reasons justify Bediako's use of contextual and extra biblical terms in his theology of "ancestor par excellence" for Jesus which remains within Vanhoozer's hermeneutical trajectory. First, Bediako used an African word which was familiar in everyday context, and conferred it with biblical meaning. Second, Bediako's use of the term ancestor is not limited to a reference to the redemptive work of Christ. The word 'ancestor' is used to refer to forefathers of the Old Testament. For instance, the New Living Translation calls the genealogy in Matthew 1 a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah. Similarly, Paul uses the word ancestor to refer to his predecessors in 2 Timothy 1:3 (ESV). Although the term 'Supreme Ancestor' used by Bediako is not explicitly stated in the Bible, using it has precedent. In the case of John, who in the fourth gospel uses Logos to present Jesus, he has taken a term which had a Greek heritage. Another term, *Kyrios,* used by Greeks in Antioch was borrowed from Hellenistic pagans who used it for their divinities. These terms were familiar in a local context but their Christian use was not.[750] Bediako has claimed that Akans already prayed to Jesus as Nana Yesu, without using the English name ancestor.[751] Third, Jesus as Supreme Ancestor falls into the theo-dramatic hermeneutical understanding. The function of Jesus as Supreme ancestor is found within the canonical text. Jesus takes the role of a mediator and the Lord over principalities and powers which is explicitly clear in Scripture. To recall, Bediako perceives Jesus as the Mediator, Lord, reigning chief, Supreme ancestor over other gods and spirits.[752] Fourth, Bediako contends that through faith-union in Christ, we become 'the seed of Abraham and heirs according to the promise' (Galatians 3:29), which makes us 'heirs together with Israel or members of one body' (Ephesians 3:6). Hence, Abraham is now our ancestor, and Jesus becomes our supreme Ancestor. Through Jesus, the Akan Christian community can have fellowship with past members of the Christian community, as well as present and future members (the visible and the invisible church).

Staying within the scope of Vanhoozarian hermeneutics, Bediako neither replicates nor innovates but rather improvises Scripture in presenting Jesus as the Supreme Ancestor par excellence. Vanhoozer elucidates concepts and terms which are extrabiblical and can be used for translation to go beyond Scripture without adding anything to Scripture or to the Christological trajectory.[753] This

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[748] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 217.

[749] For Vanhoozer's explanation Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 131 ff.

[750] Vanhoozer, 321; Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 79.

[751] Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 78.

[752] Bediako, 27.

[753] Kevin J Vanhoozer, "Into the Great 'Beyond': A Theologian's Response to the Marshall Plan," in *Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology*, by I. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids, MI./Milton Keynes, Bucks, UK: Baker Academic ; Paternoster, 2004), 89.

means that Vanhoozer's hermeneutics is confirmed as sensitive and fruitful to engage multi-religious challenges. An imperative factor in improvisation is the catholic principle, that is, the congruency of the hermeneutical route with church tradition. How does the church guard the authority of Scripture in a given contextual context?

The following section will briefly mention the place of the church in guarding the authority of Scripture. As Vanhoozer succinctly puts it, "Biblical script without ecclesial performance is empty; ecclesial performance without biblical script is blind."[754]

3.4.5 The hermeneutical role of the church in relation to the authority of Scripture

This section does not intend to give a detailed description of the hermeneutical role of the Church. It will briefly mention the function of the church and authority of Scripture in contextualization. How does the church deal with contextual concerns and the authority of Scripture? Bediako confirms Vanhoozer's call to designate a significant place for the hermeneutical role of the church in theological development. Bediako is in line with Vanhoozer's ecclesial triangulation: the work of God in Jesus, canon/translated Scripture, and the Spirit's guiding the church in a contemporary context.

Bediako's emphasis on the translatability of Scripture corroborates with the universality of Christianity. He argues that even though Scripture is translated differently in different contexts, the essence and significance of translated Scripture is the same as the original autograph. Conversely, in spite of diverse Bible translations, common elements keep the church together. He elucidates,

> Each incarnation has been different and yet each has managed to preserve elements which unite them as sharing in a common reality, elements like worship of the God of Israel, attribution of ultimate significance to Jesus Christ, a sense of belonging to a people of God extending beyond the local context and in the midst of whom God's activity is recognized, reading of common Scriptures, and sacramental use of bread and wine and water. [755]

Bediako differs from Vanhoozer who assigns different hermeneutical functions to Catholic Church and the local church in his theatrical metaphor. Bediako does not see the hermeneutical function of the church as being different or divided between the local and Catholic Church. Bediako considers local translations to be pointers to the universal nature of Christianity. He sees Catholic and the local church as one, mutually enriching and challenging each other. As long as the contextual theology of the local church maintains the common elements, it should be able to fellowship with one catholic family.[756] Hence, there is not one center of Christianity to guard the authority of Scripture, but several, with peripheries touching other centers and their potential theologies. With this

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[754] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 362.
[755] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 109.
[756] Bediako, "The Catholicity of the Church and the Universality of Theology: Comments on Christiaan Mostert's Paper," 201.

scheme, the circles do not meet but every contextual theology and their center guides other theologies and their centers, and vice versa. Bediako supports his argument with this diagram.[757]
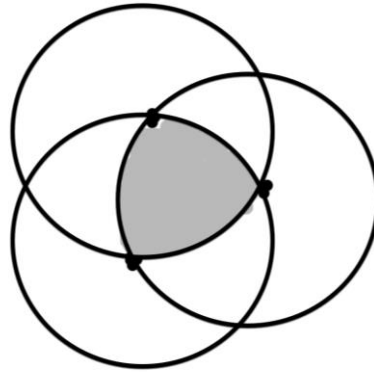
Bediako differs from Vanhoozer's scheme of church authority in addressing contextual and hermeneutical challenges in theology. Vanhoozer gives a top-down scheme of church authority in contextual theology. He looks at the church through a theatrical metaphor, with different hierarchical levels. These theatrical levels are: The masterpiece Theatre (the seven ecumenical councils) which deal with creedal theology. The second level is the regional theatre which deals with confessional theology. And the third level is the local theatre which deals with contextual concerns of the local congregation.[758] It is the responsibility of a local pastor /theologian to educate the local congregation about the creeds and confessions and yet continue to address the contextual and hermeneutical concerns in theology. Within Vanhoozer's hermeneutical scheme, the church authority with its hermeneutical agenda and ecclesial communication is influenced and controlled from the masterpiece theatre and the regional theatre. In contrast to this, Bediako's hermeneutical role of the church is circular, and it endeavors to give equal importance to all centers by way of mutual hermeneutical interaction based on the common element of the original autograph.

3.4.6 A Comprehensive understanding of Scripture

Why should theology be based on more than mere propositions or data abstracted from Scripture? Proposition, reason, and theology based on biblical data were the slogans of modernity. Vanhoozer delved into the challenges posed by the modern era: their discoveries, right methods to derive knowledge, the period of metanarrative, and the modern tools and scientific interpretive theories which dominated the divine revelation. Bediako affirms Vanhoozer while interacting with agents, both local and western, whose theological methods were

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[757] Kwame Bediako, "New Paradigms on Ecumenical Cooperation: An African Perspective," *International Review of Mission* 81, no. 323 (1992): 376.

[758] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 445–57.

influenced by the modern era. Modern missionaries from the west were influencing African Christianity and imposing their thoughts on it. Dissatisfaction with the modern tools and their theories in Bible interpretations have been well pronounced in the work of Vanhoozer and confirmed by Bediako even in the African context. In spite of their frustration with modernity and the theological methods employed, Bediako, as Vanhoozer, did not totally reject the modern tools and theories to study the Bible. If the modern period offered rational or propositional truth, Vanhoozer proposed postpropositional truth. Similarly, Bediako was not rebutting the western missionaries who were influenced by enlightenment, but attempted to Africanize the message which was communicated to him in modernity's wrapping. While the missionaries in Africa built their Christian affirmation through assertion/proposition, Bediako argues for Christian affirmations as recognition. Even more, if western missionaries used a biblicist approach for African theology, Bediako argues for a comprehensive understanding of the Bible. Hence, Bediako confirms Vanhoozer by arguing for a comprehensive understanding of the Bible, which includes both propositions and everyday situations of life in the Bible. Bediako also took the local religious context and cultural idioms into consideration, not just as catalysts, but also substructures in African Christian theology. Although Bediako insists on a comprehensive understanding of Scripture, his approach is limited to religious factors. Moreover, terms and concepts for Scripture translation are limited to local ATR, ignoring the fact that the African context is more than just the spiritual realms of ATR.

Furthermore, parallel statements by Vanhoozer and Bediako display the same discomfort around theology based on propositions abstracted from Scripture. Vanhoozer points out, "One of the most influential images of theology as *scientia* [science] of Scripture depicts it as the process of abstracting revealed truths-propositions from the biblical text and arranging them in logical order."[759] Similarly, Bediako observes, "It is perhaps not an exaggeration to say that there is a general tendency in Christian circles to treat Christian affirmation as essentially theological data."[760]

Does that mean that the theological datum abstracted from Scripture does not validate the authority of Scripture? For Vanhoozer, propositions hinder but do not manipulate the appropriation of Scripture. Hence, Vanhoozer proposes a postpropositionalist approach which takes into account both the content and the form (genre) as Scripture. Bediako's hermeneutical route confirms Vanhoozer's argument for both Scripture's 'form and content,' as essential in understanding Sola Scriptura. Further, Bediako in line with Vanhoozer refers to the scientia of Scripture as 'recognition' and not as assertions/propositions. He argues that Christian affirmations call believers to identify, recognize themselves, or participate in the truth of biblical revelation. This recognition or participation, points to Vanhoozer's metaphor of drama, which calls believers to participate in the drama of redemption. For Bediako, by believing in Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit, a believer recognizes their place and participates in the truth of divine revelation. Bediako's argument corroborates with Vanhoozer's idea of

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[759] Vanhoozer, 266.
[760] Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 38.

participation in the drama of redemption. Through this participation in theo-drama, Bediako sees natural African culture and adoptive culture, merge with the redemptive story.

3.5 A summary of findings and Conclusion

To reiterate, as a conclusion, this chapter investigated the main research question of the dissertation, "In what ways could Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theory contribute towards a theology which is contextually relevant to the Indian context, while faithfully upholding the Reformed vision of the authority of Scripture?" The main purpose of this chapter was to test Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology against Bediako's African hermeneutics within a multi-religious context. Therefore, the research question of this chapter was, "To what extent does an interaction with Bediako's African hermeneutics confirm, contradict or improve Vanhoozer's hermeneutical model, especially with respect to its potential to interact with a multi-religious context? The outcome of this chapter is twofold. First is the study of Bediako's hermeneutics within the multi-religious context in Africa, and second is the assessment of Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology against Bediako's hermeneutics. The second part analyses whether Bediako confirms, improves or contradicts Vahoozer's hermeneutical theology within a multi religious context.

Bediako was a theologian, Presbyterian pastor, theological visionary and explorer, who served God and his people in Africa in a multi religious context. He neither hesitated to show his venerability as a dramaturge, nor was satisfied as a pastor theologian with existing theologies in Africa. He continued questioning the existing hermeneutical theology in Africa, which was "Christianizing African Theology." In response to the existing hermeneutical theology in Africa, Bediako proposed a hermeneutical route which was "Africanizing Christian theology." While doing so, Bediako first vehemently responded to the existing perception of Africans as cannibals, illiterates and uncivilized people, and legitimized the usefulness of pre-Christian African experience in African theology. To argue for "Africanizing Christian theology", Bediako chose the hermeneutical route of Tatian, Tertullian, Justin and Clement of Alexandria from the early church period, Archbishop Yannoulatos's Christian dialogue with Traditional thought forms, and Turner's understanding of Primal religions of the world.

This research will now summarize Bediako's doctrine of Scripture amidst the challenges of multi religiosity. While arguing for Africanizing Christian theology, the Bible became the primary source of theology for Bediako along with African Traditional Religion. Bediako employed several African metaphors such as prism, a record of God's engagement with culture, a road map, a story and history, to portray the authority of Scripture in theology. Bediako perceived Scripture as a prism which sheds rays of light into the culture and traditions of Africa. The Scripture becomes the African story in which African participation fuses or is adopted into the story of Scripture. Consequently, Jesus is considered as the Supreme Ancestor. Bediako is against the traditional hermeneutical route which is based on extracting theological propositions from the Bible. He, however, alongside the Scriptures, also employed ATR in his hermeneutical theology. While rejecting the traditional hermeneutical route, Bediako used

African sources other than Scripture in his hermeneutical theology such as ATR, oral theological traditions, role of local Christian prophets, prophetesses, ancestors, and the lived experience of African Christians in their socio-cultural and religious context. Bediako strongly argues that ATR has a genuine knowledge of God, though expressed in contextual terms. Hence, the role of these sources plays a significant role in the translatability of Scripture by legitimatizing ATR as a genuine means of divine revelation. The translatability of Scripture projected God, whose name was revered in indigenous languages in pre-Christian experience in Africa, as the God of the Bible. The translated Scripture became essentially and substantially equal to its original autograph because the local idioms and concepts provided cultural platforms to understand Christian truth.

Further, the research now will summarize the findings of the assessment which analyzed Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology against Bediako's hermeneutics within his multi religious context. The analysis of this chapter shows that Bediako confirms Vanhoozer on several hermeneutical elements within a multi religious context. Bediako confirms Vanhoozer's hermeneutical insistence on the translatability of Scripture by employing local prosaic. He further validates Vanhoozer who affirms that through translation Scripture becomes God's Word. Moreover, Bediako confirms Vanhoozer who argues for redefinition of contextual terms in appropriating theology. Bediako confirms and further improves Vanhoozer's Ecclesial triangulation of the Holy Spirit ministering the truth of Jesus through the inspired Word of God to the Church in the world today. Further, Bediako improves on Vanhoozer by laying more importance on the linguistic performance of the church. This means that the emphasis is laid on the Holy Spirit guiding the African Church in illuminating the meaning of Scripture. Also, Bediako affirms Vanhoozer's drama, theatre and story metaphors to perceive the redemptive story of the Bible. Bediako, however, does not take detailed elements of the drama or story metaphor but instead uses his theological judgment to relate the redemptive story to the African story. Further, Bediako affirms and improves on Vanhoozer in improvising extra-biblical terms in theology. Bediako also affirms Vanhoozer's insistence on theology based on more than just proposition extracted from the Bible.

However, Bediako contradicts Vanhoozer in relation to the status of the original autograph. Vanhoozer argues for the original autograph to be God's Word, even without finding its destiny in a particular context through translation, whereas Bediako considers the original autograph to be abstract. Further, the research concludes that their hermeneutical methodology differs. If Vanhoozer aspires to 'Christianize the local religious experience,' Bediako aims to 'Africanize the Christian experience': Jesus as mediator, Lord, reigning chief, and Supreme Ancestor over other gods and spirits. Although Bediako affirms Vanhoozer's hermeneutical role of the church in theological development, he does not see the hermeneutical function of the local church as being different from the Catholic Church. Bediako contradicts Vanhoozer who assigns a hermeneutical role to the church as top down. In contrast to this, Bediako's hermeneutical role of the church is circular. He proposes several centers of Christianity which give mutual hermeneutical interactions based on having the original autographs (the Bible) in common. Bediako contradicts Vanhoozer by employing ATR everyday situations in theological formation by not just by taking them as catalysts but also

considering them as a substructure in African Christian theology, as a vehicle of revelation, and also endowing them with salvific values.

Conclusion: The purpose of this chapter was to contribute to the main research question of the dissertation: In what ways could Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theory contribute towards a theology which is contextually relevant to the Indian context, while faithfully upholding the Reformed authority of Scripture? The investigation of chapter two concludes that Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theory pertinently addresses hermeneutical and contextual challenges all the while remaining within the vision of the Reformed doctrine of Scripture even when moving beyond or post traditional Reformed vision of Scripture.

The investigating question of chapter three was: "To what extent does an interaction with the African hermeneutics of Bediako confirm, contradict or improve Vanhoozer's hermeneutical model, especially with respect to its potential to interact within a multi-religious context? Accordingly, the chapter first described Bediako's hermeneutical theology, focussed on the doctrine of Scripture amidst multi religiosity. The second part of the chapter assessed Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology against Bediako hermeneutics amidst a multi religious context. Based on the research, the chapter affirms that Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology has convincing potential to address the challenges from a multi religious context as reasonably assessed through Bediako hermeneutics. Through a virtual assessment of Vanhoozer, Bediako affirms that there are several Vanhoozerian hermeneutical elements, and the doctrine of Scripture, which are relevant for a multi religious context. In several junctures Bediako improves Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology, yet it should be mentioned that there are occasions where Bediako contradicts and moves away from Vanhoozer.

Hence, the investigation of the chapter concludes that Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theory and the Reformed doctrine of Scripture, is satisfactorily reliable, relevant and fitting for a multi religious context.

CHAPTER FOUR

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE HERMENEUTICAL THEOLOGY OF VANHOOZER OVER AGAINST THE POSTCOLONIAL HERMENEUTICS OF SUGIRTHARAJAH WITH AN EMPHASIS ON THE PRIMACY OF SCRIPTURE

4.1 Introduction

Since the British colonization of India, a recurring accusation against Christians in India has been that they are followers of a foreign/western religion, which has reviled Indian culture and led Indian Christians to renounce their patriotic sentiments. R.S. Sugirtharajah, however, goes a step further and vehemently questions the West for dominating all theological development in India. The West has done this by not only pushing forward the authority of the Bible as the only source of theology amidst the plurality of sacred texts, but also for using the Bible as a colonial apparatus. Further, he claims that the authority of the Bible employed by the west has not only despised Indian traditional hermeneutics per se, but also rejected and devalued the wealth of various religious texts already present in India. Simply put, the authority of the Bible was wrapped up in a colonial agenda devaluing other texts; it was a stumbling block to a genuine theology in India. Moreover, the authority of the Bible functioned as a polarizing agent, not only between Christians and the people of other faiths, but also between Christian denominations.

The over-arching purpose of this dissertation is to investigate, "In what ways can Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theory contribute towards a theology which is contextually relevant to the Indian context, while faithfully upholding the Reformed vision on the authority of Scripture?" The research anticipates two propelling contextual challenges in this hermeneutical endeavor, namely, religious pluralism and hidden power structure. In chapter two, the research dealt with the question, "In what way does Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theory address hermeneutical and contextual challenges and to what extent does it succeed in continuing the tradition of a Reformed view on Scripture?" After this, in chapter three, the research examined the question, "To what extent does an interaction with Bediako's African hermeneutics confirm, contradict or improve Vanhoozer's hermeneutical model, especially with respect to its potential to interact with a multi-religious context?"

In order to present the issue of the power-structure involved in employing the authority of Scripture in theology, and to test Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology against it, the research has employed R.S. Sugirtharajah's postcolonial hermeneutics. There is a surfeit of postcolonial theologians who have been vocal in pointing out the power structure in Indian Christian theology. However, it is Sugirtharajah who has been a pioneer, and a veteran postcolonial biblical critic.

He has vehemently argued against the western presumption on the primacy of Scripture, the western way of reading the Bible through different western philosophies, biblical theology, critical principles and methods of enlightenment. The western presumption on the primacy of Scripture not only dominated all theological formation in India but it also became the ally of imperialism.[761] This research will not delve into a wide range of postcolonial critics and biblical criticism. Rather, the purpose of this chapter is to assess, "To what extent does an interaction with Sugirtharajah's postcolonial hermeneutics confirm, contradict or improve Vanhoozer's hermeneutical model, especially with respect to its potential sensitivity to the role of power-structures in theology? The power structure in hermeneutical theology will be dealt with within the context of multi religiosity and the role of the natives and west in theological formation.

Accordingly, the first part will describe the overall look of the chapter. The second part will briefly outline Sugirtharajah's biography and seminal work in the postcolonial context. The third section will investigate the doctrine of Scripture amidst a power structure envisaged by Sugirtharajah. This will all then be followed by a critical appraisal of Sugirtharajah's hermeneutics. The final section will assess the relevance of Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology amidst religious power structures against Sugirtharajah's postcolonial hermeneutics. The focus of the study will be the authority of Scripture. The conclusion will offer a quick summary of the assessment of Vanhoozer against Sugirtharajah. It will pinpoint Sugirtharajah's affirmations, contradictions and suggestions for improvement of Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology amidst power structures. As in Chapter 3 this research will proceed by constructing a 'virtual' theological dialogue between Vanhoozer and Sugirtharajah that includes two way traffic between their thoughts. Not only will Vanhoozer be approached from the perspective of Sugirtharajah but Vanhoozer, in turn will also be used to interact with Sugirtharajah. This will help to deepen their theological and hermeneutical encounter. After that the evaluation and conclusion will be narrowed down to the guiding question of the chapter, culminating in a summary of the findings.

4.2 R.S Sugirtharajah: A Brief Sketch of His Theological Journey

In the era of missionary enterprise in the 19th century, one of the missionary hermeneutical methods in India was to use the Bible to show evil elements in other religions and project Jesus as the cure for all evils. Ironically, several Hindu leaders were attempting to incorporate the image of Jesus within their Hindu philosophical system to show how the Hindu religion can illuminate the experience of Christ. As a result, a few of these images of Jesus incorporated in Hindu thinking were: *Jesus as a Supreme Guide to human happiness* – Rajah Ram Mohun Roy, *Jesus as the Son of man, seeking the lost, the least and the lost* – Rabindranath Tagore, *Jesus as Supreme Satyagrahi* (lover and fighter for truth) – Mahatma Gandhi, *Jesus as Advaitin* (one who has realized destiny with

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[761] R. S. Sugirtharajah, "Catching the Post or How I Became an Accidental Theorist," in *Shaping a Global Theological Mind*, ed. Darren Mark C. (England, USA: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008), 168–69 eBook format.

Brahman/God) – Swami Akhilananda, Vivekananda.[762] Similarly, several Indian Christian theologians joined the bandwagon of indigenous theology to show that Jesus is the completion of Hindu experience. Consequently, through this religious integration in Indian Christian theology, a few contextual theological images were developed: Jesus as *Prajapati* (Lord of creatures) – K.M. Banerjee, Jesus as *Avatara* (Incarnation) –A. J. Appasamy, V. Chakkarai, and Jesus as Eternal *OM* (Logos) – S. Jesudasan.[763] During the Post-missionary era, Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah entered the hermeneutical scene in India with postcolonial hermeneutics. He classified both the existing hermeneutical approaches of the Hindu and Indian Christian scholars as a colonial hermeneutical trap which aimed at comparing and contrasting their theology against each other, centering and marginalizing the theological approach, with divide and rule methodology.[764] Sugirtharajah's postcolonial hermeneutics aims "to bring the person of Jesus, in conjunction with other religious figures, into a revitalizing and enriching encounter with them and with the Christian faith itself."[765]

4.2.1   Sugirtharajah: A pioneer of postcolonial biblical criticism

Sugirtharajah is a Sri Lankan theologian, who, until recently was a professor of biblical hermeneutics at the University of Birmingham in England. At present, he is an Emeritus professor of biblical hermeneutics in the department of Theology of Religions, University of Birmingham. Sugirtharajah studied theology in India at United Theological College, Bangalore. After this study, he taught in a few seminaries in India such as the Serampore College, Kolkota, and Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary, Madurai. Later he moved to the UK and taught in Selly Oak colleges, Birmingham, England, and subsequently became a professor of biblical hermeneutics in the University of Birmingham.

As a background to his development as a biblical critic, Sugirtharajah reminiscences about the atmosphere in theological education during his seminary days in India. He recalls that theological education was centered on the Bible, and systematic theology, whereas other subjects related to Indian contexts were undermined. Contextualization was just a catchphrase, and it was not considered worthy enough to be discussed in systematic theology. Western methods and theologies, such as secular theologies, biblical theology, critical principles and historical methods of enlightenment, were considered imperative in the

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[762] R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *Asian Faces of Jesus*, New Edition (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1993), The story so far, eBook format; M.M Thomas, *Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance* (London: SCM Press, 1969); M.M Thomas, "The Absoluteness of Jesus Christ and Christ-Centred Syncretism," *The Ecumenical Review* 37, no. 4 (October 1985): 387–97.

[763] Jacob Kavunkal, "The Mystery of God in and Through Hinduism," in *Christian Theology in Asia*, ed. Sebastian C.H. Kim, eBook (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Singapore, São Paulo: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 22–40.

[764] For a few hermeneutical approaches to theology in India refer to, Israel Selvanayagam, "Waters of Life and Indian Cups: Protestant Attempts at Theologizing in India," in *Christian Theology in Asia*, ed. Sebastian C.H. Kim, eBook (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Singapore, São Paulo: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 41–70.

[765] R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations: An Alternative Way of Reading the Bible and Doing Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2003), 5.

theological syllabus.[766] While the theological scenario in India was busy enthralling the Enlightenment, demythologization and other western theological writings, there were a few scholars who had started questioning the western power dominance and their validity of hermeneutical methods. Among them were two theologians whose written work had intrigued Sugirtharajah. The first was José Miguez Bonino's *Marxist Critical Tools: Are They Helpful in Breaking the Stranglehold of Idealist Hermeneutics,*[767] and the second text was Edward Said's *Orientalism.*[768]Sugirtharajah considers both these texts crucial factors in the development of his postcolonial biblical criticism.[769]

Sugirtharajah's postcolonial fellows call him 'Ubiquitous.'[770] His incredible contribution to the development of postcolonial biblical criticism includes his editing of the anthology, *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, which has gone through four editions (1991, 1995, 2006, 2016). In 1991 it received a Catholic Book award.[771] His contribution towards Asian biblical hermeneutics with works such as *Asian Faces of Jesus, Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Trends* and Biblical interpretation for the Asian and African diaspora has been groundbreaking. Further, he has pioneered and centered his entire biblical and theological studies into postcolonial biblical criticism.[772]

4.2.2   Formation of postcolonial biblical criticism: Sugirtharajah's perspective

At the risk of brevity, this section synopsizes the historical development of postcolonial criticism and its relationship with biblical criticism. This section is based on Sugirtharajah's own view on the development of postcolonial criticism.

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[766] Sugirtharajah, "Catching the Post or How I Became an Accidental Theorist," 163–70.

[767] Míguez Bonino José, *Marxist Critical Tools. Are They Helpful in Breaking the Stranglehold of Idealist Hermeneutics?*, n.d.

[768] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (UK: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).

[769] Sugirtharajah, "Catching the Post or How I Became an Accidental Theorist," 171.

[770] Tat-Siong Benny Liew, ed., *Postcolonial Interventions: Essays in Honor of R.S. Sugirtharajah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press Ltd, 2009), 1.

[771] "Department of Theology and Religion: RS Sugirtharajah," accessed April 18, 2014, http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/staff/profiles/tr/sugirtharajah-rs.aspx.

[772] Some of the publications are: R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and Asia* (Harvard University Press, 2013); R. S. Sugirtharajah, *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia, 1 edition (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2009); R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*; R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations*, 1 edition (Sheffield: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 1999); R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters* (Cambridge University Press, 2001); R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: History, Method, Practice*, 1 edition (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., "Introduction: Theoretical Practices," in *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader*, 1 edition (Malden, MA ; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), 5–6; R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Troublesome Texts: The Bible in Colonial and Contemporary Culture* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press Ltd, 2008); R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *Postcolonial Bible*, 1 edition (Sheffield: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 1998).

4.2.2.1 Development of postcolonial criticism

Some preliminary remarks on the term postcolonialism are necessary in order to comprehend the factors which led to the constitution of postcolonial biblical interpretation. When it comes to defining postcolonialism, Sugirtharajah observes that there is always confusion and vigorous debate among critics[773] on the meaning of both postcolonialism and post-colonialism. The difference in spelling is simply the hyphen, yet it adds nuance to the word's meaning,[774] which according to Sugirtharajah contributes unhelpful complexities, subtleties and incongruities. He, therefore, proposes 'postcolonial' as the correct spelling of the word employed in biblical criticism.[775] "Post-colonial" refers to a historic factor and the repercussions of that historic colonial period. "Postcolonial", however, entails a counterdiscursive strategy for delineating or un-doing the discourses that started from the colonial period. And in return, it continues to question the prevailing patterns of neocolonizing tendencies.[776] Sugirtharajah defines "postcolonialism" as,

> … a reactive resistance discourse of the colonized who critically interrogate dominant knowledge systems in order to recover the past from the Western slander and misinformation of the colonial period, and who also continue to interrogate neo-colonizing tendencies after the declaration of independence.[777]

Furthermore, postcolonialism has both historical and theoretical connotations. As a historical period, it indicates the end of European colonialism, after which the 'independent states' were considered postcolonial. It is generally believed that postcolonialism as a period began in 1960. As a theoretical nuance, it examines socio-cultural, religious, and political scenarios of the colonized states before and after colonialism.[778] According to Sugirtharajah, the arrival of postcolonialism as a reading strategy or as a discourse coincided with, and was assisted by, three key events. They were: the 'failure of the socialist experiment, the rise of global capitalism, and the loss of political power among the Third World countries.'[779] These events created a platform for the diasporaic elite of Third World origins to interpret and critique colonialism from two diverse aspects. The first aspect is the way the colonizer constructed the image of the colonized (colonialists), and the second is the way the colonized articulated their own image (nationalists). Though the critique of colonialism came from diverse disciplines, postcolonialism

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[773] This chapter will not study the unending and vigorous debate among the critics on the proper meaning of postcolonialism/ post-colonialism. This chapter, however, will study only Sugirtharajah's use of the word. For an introductory reading and the meaning of the word. Refer to, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and et al, eds., *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2000), 168-173.

[774] Simon Samuel, "A Postcolonial Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus" (Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation, Sheffield, University of Sheffield, 2002), 4.

[775] Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 13.

[776] Jayachitra Lalitha, "Postcolonial Feminism, the Bible and the Native Indian Women," in *Evangelical Postcolonial Conversations: Global Awakenings in Theology and Praxis*, ed. Kay Higuera Smith, Jayachitra Lalitha, and L. Daniel Hawk (Illinois: IVP Press, 2014), Part one, Ebook.

[777] Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 13.

[778] Sugirtharajah, 12.

[779] Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 247.

facilitated this critical reading.[780] Along with these events, there were several diverse factors, such as 'anti-colonial resistance writings,[781] Marxism,[782] feminism,[783] psychoanalysis, and poststructuralism'[784] which assisted in the development of the postcolonial theory. The three main originators of the postcolonial theory and practice were Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.[785] These three were heavily influenced by poststructuralists, Said by Foucault; Homi Bhabha by Althusser and Lacan; and Gayatri Spivak by Derrida.[786]Although these writers never intended to be postcolonialist in their writings, later in the postcolonial studies, their writings were acknowledged as groundbreaking for postcolonialism.[787] Out of the three revolutionary writers, it was Edward Said's *Orientalism* which is considered to have commenced postcolonialism.

Sugirtharajah mentions several functions of Postcolonialism as a theory. First, it investigates and describes various aspects such as 'nationality, ethnicity, race and gender' both during and after colonialism. Second, it also examines literature produced by the colonialists. It exposes colonial agenda in the description of the colonized 'others', in their history of the cultures, nations and peoples. Third, it participates in repairing the damaged image by the colonialist, and critically revises the representation of the colonized 'others'.[788] There are a few verbs which are often used by postcolonial criticism to respond to the aftermath of colonialism, and to explain the task of postcolonialism. These verbs are: investigating, reopening, rereading, recovering, identifying, decentering, transgressing, interrogating, placing, examining, scrutinizing, studying, questioning, paying attention, repairing, and reconstructing.[789] Sugirtharajah, however, confesses that the task of defining postcolonialism is hard due to fact that scholars, especially freelance scholars, do not specify the 'purpose and parameter' of their critical study. Also, each scholar sets their own definition, purpose and parameter, depending on their academic discipline and location.[790]

4.2.2.2 Relation between Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation

Sugirtharajah clarifies several terms which are used when postcolonial criticism is used in relation to biblical studies. In conjunction with

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[780] Sugirtharajah, 247; Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 10.

[781] Sugirtharajah cites the contribution of anti-colonial resistance writers or theorists such as Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Albert Memmi, and C.L.R. James. Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*, 11.

[782] Sugirtharajah clarifies that this Marxism is a non-western form which was developed to investigate the "historical forms of imperialism" Sugirtharajah, 14.

[783] The feminism Sugirtharajah refers to is the non-western 'Third World Feminism.'

[784] Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*, 11.

[785] Fernando F. Segovia and Stephen D. Moore, "Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Beginning, Trajectories, Intersections," in *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections*, ed. Stephen D. Moore and Fernando F. Segovia (London, New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 12.

[786] Ashcroft, Griffiths, and et al, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 168.

[787] Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 16.

[788] Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*, 12–13.

[789] For complete description of how these verbs are used in postcolonial criticism, refer to 'the concerns and preoccupations' of postcolonialism, in Sugirtharajah, 14–15.

[790] Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 245.

postcolonialism, do biblical studies become postcolonial biblical theory, or postcolonial biblical criticism or postcolonial theology? Sugirtharajah clarifies the difference in the terms by pointing to the task of postcolonialism. Since the word 'theory' signifies a process of understanding and it is descriptive in nature, postcolonialism is not a theory in the strictest sense of the term.[791] Since criticism is about enquiry, instigation, evaluation and interpretation, postcolonialism is a criticism.[792] The task of postcolonialism is "essentially a style of inquiry, an insight or a perspective, a catalyst, a new way of life."[793] Hence, in conjunction with biblical studies, postcolonialism functions as Postcolonial biblical criticism, aiming to "situate colonialism at the center of the Bible and biblical interpretation."[794] Simply put, it investigates and exposes colonial agenda in both the biblical texts and their interpretations.[795]

The agenda and the goal of the postcolonial biblical criticism is different from various critical readings of the Bible, like historical criticism or the classical Protestant way of approaching the Scriptures. However, Sugirtharajah argues that its approach to studying the Bible is similar. A few similar questions asked in any critical study is asked in postcolonial biblical criticism as well. The common critical questions asked are,

> …What is a text?"; "Who produced it?"; "How is its meaning determined?"; "How is it circulated?"; "Who interprets it?"; "Who are the beneficiaries of the interpretation?"; "What were the circumstances of the production?"; "Does a text have any message?"; "If so, what sort?"[796]

Although the approach is similar, the aim and agenda of postcolonial biblical criticism is different. Sugirtharajah gives a lengthy distinction between postcolonial biblical criticism, European Enlightenment, and Protestant biblical reading. The main distinction between postcolonial biblical criticism from other Bible reading practices is that the questions are posed not to produce theology, or investigate the unity of the Bible, justification of faith for individuals, biblical history, religious worldview of the Bible, or the kingdom of God, but is a hermeneutics of suspicion. It examines 'politics, culture, and economics of the colonial milieu' embedded in the Bible and their colonial interpretation.[797] Also, another significant distinction of Postcolonial biblical studies is that it also explores the deserved right and authority of a narrator and interpreter over their own stories.[798]

Furthermore, the hermeneutical agenda of postcolonial biblical criticism is coherent with its primary aim, that is, to scrutinize the Bible, its interpretation in exegesis, commentaries, and theology for its colonial entanglement. Sugirtharajah gives a detailed agenda of postcolonial biblical criticism when studying the Bible.

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[791] Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 14.

[792] Sugirtharajah, 13.

[793] R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader*, 1 edition (Malden, MA ; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), 9.

[794] Sugirtharajah, "Introduction: Theoretical Practices," 17.

[795] R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*, 4.

[796] Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*, 2.

[797] Sugirtharajah, 2–3.

[798] Sugirtharajah, 3.

First, the postcolonial Bible critic exposes the Bible for its biblical empires – Assyrian, Egyptian, Persian, Greek, and Roman,[799] which were intentionally left out by the Reformation–Eurocentric biblical studies and the focus was diverted to church related theology.[800] Second, postcolonial biblical interpretation examines the manner in which empires, both biblical empires and Western imperialism, were represented in the previous biblical interpretations such as Bible exegesis, and commentaries.[801] Third, it establishes a 'retrieval hermeneutics', which strives to identify lost voices in the Bible (like Mary Magdalene) and empower them. It excavates marginalized voices (those once colonized) in biblical interpretation, and recovers the work of missionaries who were against the colonial agenda, and were focussed on genuine humanitarian work.[802] Fourth, it further repairs and reconstructs the cultural and theological image distorted in commentary writing and Bible translation by the colonialists.[803] While postcolonial Bible reading reveals power struggles and retrieves lost voices in hermeneutics, it also engages with and contemplates postcolonial situations such as "hybridity, fragmentation, deterritorialization, and/or hyphenated, double or multiple identities".[804]

Even though postcolonial biblical criticism claims to fight for the rights of the once colonized, postcolonial critical study has not yet convinced and impacted the biblical scholarships of Third World countries, and it has been limited only to the elite who are settled outside the Third World. Sugirtharajah points out three reasons for its inefficaciousness in theological studies. First, most theological colleges and seminaries in Third World countries have no interaction with the so-called secular and liberal literary world outside the seminaries, which can challenge, debate, and repair their theological conclusions. Second, these theological institutions are the recipients of colonial mission agendas. Since most Christians in these places come from the lower strata of society, they have only witnessed the charitable side of colonial missions. In order to continue as beneficiaries, awkward questions of colonial agenda are intentionally overlooked,[805] For example, in the 1970s, the Bible was not used to address casteism in India and hence it lost its credibility as a source to address social injustice.[806] Third, the Third World countries are obsessed with the Protestant and Western methods of doing theology. So much so that the method of doing contextual theology is also inspired by the colonial hermeneutical agenda which does not address contextual concerns. This hermeneutical approach is further

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[799] Mosese Mailo, "The Challenge and Contribution of Postcolonial Theory to Theological Hermeneutics in Oceania," *The Pacific Journal of Theology (SPATS)*, II, no. 46 (2011): 40.

[800] Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*, 46.

[801] Sugirtharajah, 47.

[802] Sugirtharajah names a few of them, Bartolomé de las Casas (1484-1566), William Knibb (1803-1845), John Colenso (1814-1883), James Long (1814-1887), Sugirtharajah, 49.

[803] Sugirtharajah, 51.

[804] R. S. Sugirtharajah, "A Brief Memorandum on Postcolonialism and Biblical Studies.," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 73, no. March (1999): 5.

[805] R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*, 100–103.

[806] Kay Higuera Smith, Jayachitra Lalitha, and L. Daniel Hawk, eds., *Evangelical Postcolonial Conversations: Global Awakenings in Theology and Praxis* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Press, 2014), Postcolonial challenge to evangelicals, Ebook.

inculcated in biblical interpreters in seminaries today.[807] They continue to grapple with the same the old hermeneutical methods of colonialists without producing anything new.[808]

4.3 The doctrine of Scripture Amidst Power Structure: A Postcolonial Hermeneutics proposed by Sugirtharajah

This section will study the nature, the authority, and the function of the Bible espoused in postcolonial biblical criticism. It will further describe how the translation and interpretation of the Bible, the Bible in vernacular hermeneutics, and a postcolonial reading of the Bible can all be executed amidst power structure in a multi-religious postcolonial context as proposed by Sugirtharajah.

4.3.1   The Divine nature of the Bible

The question of the divine and its relation to the sacred text is inevitable in a discussion pertaining to the doctrine of the Scripture. Who is Jesus and what is the relation of Jesus Christ to the Bible in Sugirtharajah's hermeneutics? Since the focus of the study is the Bible and not to construct the doctrine of Jesus Christ per se, nonetheless, after a short description of Jesus in Sugirtharajah hermeneutics, the section will focus on the nature of the Bible.

First is the doctrine of Jesus. Sugirtharajah is a religious pluralist, he does not believe in Jesus Christ as the redeemer. The historical resurrection of Jesus is not a priority for him. Instead his emphasis is on how Jesus can be placed with other Asian religious masters.[809] The principle that Jesus relates with human beings to make them divine matters more to him than the historicity of Jesus.[810] His focus is on "intuitively experiencing Christ of faith" and not to ravel on the historical Jesus.[811] Further, the belief in Jesus is not based on the Scripture alone and the Church's traditions but on the multiple religious impressions, philosophical insights and social context of Asia.[812] Sugirtharajah asks, if truth claims made about Jesus are based on Jesus' own truth claims or based on the confessional statement of a community? He answers,

> Basically, what Asian Christians need is to look again at the relation between God's self-disclosure in the person and work of Jesus and God's relation toward all human beings. How special is this revelation in comparison to the experiences of Buddha, Mohammed and Confucius? Does the Christian claim to uniqueness limit God's freedom to be present to people in other religious histories?[813]

Sugirtharajah proposes that Jesus should be perceived in conjunction with other religious figures without sounding superior. These meetings between Jesus and

[807] Mailo, "The Challenge and Contribution of Postcolonial Theory to Theological Hermeneutics in Oceania," 43.

[808] R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*, 103.

[809] R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Jesus in Asia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018), Conclusion: East and west: different trajectories, eBook format.

[810] Sugirtharajah, Conclusion, East and west: different trajectories, Ebook format.

[811] Sugirtharajah, Conclusion: Pots and kettles, beam and speck, eBook format.

[812] Sugirtharajah, *Asian Faces of Jesus*, Prologue and perspective, eBook format.

[813] Sugirtharajah, Epilogue, The question of uniqueness-A re-look, eBook format.

the other religious figures should be revitalizing and enriching. Hence, Sugirtharajah accepts Jesus as a wisdom figure: Wisdom sage, and presents him as such. This image of Jesus, according to Sugirtharajah, is open, within the milieu of religious pluralism, and less imperialistic, at the same time as being "committed to the poor, women, children, and the dispossessed."[814] The power of the Wisdom tradition is that it is based on Wisdom sayings and it is capable of borrowing from any cultural resources, and accepted by all because "The strength of the Wisdom tradition is that it is universal."[815]

The Second is the nature of the Bible in Sugirtharajah's hermeneutics. The Bible is neither considered a 'divine-human encounter' nor its recorded narrative as God-guided events.[816] He does not see it as a 'divinely guaranteed source of truth'[817] as the Christian Church believes, but a compilation of several books comprised of so called 'divine-human' events within Jewish and converted communities during the Jesus movement.[818] Sugirtharajah believes the Bible to be a collection of books written with a strong ideological and theological agenda. He states, "… the Bible is a cultural, ideological, ritual, and spiritual depository of a people who lived in West Asia."[819] Further, Sugirtharajah perceives the Bible as a collection of books that are not 'neutral documents'[820] but have strong ideological, theological and colonial entanglement. In Sugirtharajah's hermeneutics, the Bible is considered as literature originating from various colonial contacts: "Egyptian, Persian, Assyrian, Hellenistic and Roman – and was produced under the courtly supervision of the Davidic and Solomonic dynasty…."[821] Sugirtharajah neither discards the Bible, nor embraces it. Rather, he proposes a Third, 'in-between way', which, he thinks, keeps a 'check on domination' of either position in shaping postcolonial theology.[822] Having said that, Sugirtharajah does not deny the fact that the biblical narratives may have elements well used for spiritual nourishment. Yet postcolonial hermeneutics does not read the texts this way – to quench any moral or spiritual thirst.[823]

4.3.2   The Authority of the Bible

Before delving into Sugirtharajah's perception of the authority of the Bible, the research will first point out Sugirtharajah's observation as to how the authority and the meaning of the Bible is 'informed, influenced and infused' by different reading communities. These interpretative communities, which impact, instill, and inculcate the meaning of the Bible, are the Church, the Academy and the pluralistic societies in which the Bible takes root.[824]

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[814] Sugirtharajah, Eplilogue, Jesus: wisdom teacher, eBook format.
[815] Sugirtharajah, Epilogue, Jesus: wisdom teacher, eBook format.
[816] Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 251 eBook format.
[817] R. S. Sugirtharajah, "Texts Are Always with You: Christians and Their Bibles," *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 9, no. Art. 6 (1996): 12.
[818] Sugirtharajah, 8.
[819] Sugirtharajah, 8.
[820] Sugirtharajah, 8.
[821] Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 251 eBook format.
[822] R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*, 113.
[823] Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*, 185 eBook format.
[824] Sugirtharajah, "Texts Are Always with You: Christians and Their Bibles," 9.

The first reading community is the Church. The church considers the Bible to be authoritative. In the Church, the Bible is seen as a confessional document, the Bible is revered as a collection of guaranteed sources of truth, the Bible is conceived as the progressively revealed word of God, a unique and objective word of truth, and all sufficient for Christian nurture and growth.[825] The second reading community is the Academy, which considers the bible (in lower case) as any other historical document and hence seeks to retrieve the literary and historical nuances of the text. In doing so, it employs the rules and techniques set by the academy. Although the academy may not consider the Bible as the revealed word of God, it regards the Bible's authority as 'a witness to the truth.'[826] This is due to the fact that the art of interpretation employed to study the Bible is intertwined with western subjugation, and so promotes Eurocentric supremacy, argues Sugirtharajah.[827] The third reading community is a society which is religiously pluralistic. The religious pluralistic community does not give privileged authoritative status to the Bible but groups it together with all the other sacred scriptures available. So, it is considered equal to all other religious books. Like any other religious text, the Bible in a pluralistic society plays a secondary role. Religious experience plays the primary role in developing theology in a pluralistic society.[828] In fact, all religious texts including the Bible are equally considered 'sacred narratives.'[829]

After pointing out several elements of the Bible which are considered authoritative by these reading communities, Sugirtharajah now points out his departure from these reading communities. However, Sugirtharajah's aim is to puncture the intrinsic authoritativeness given to the Bible by the Church, and powered by the West.[830] In Sugirtharajah's hermeneutics, therefore, the reader decides on the meaning and authority of the Bible. Just like the way Christ is perceived in relation to other spiritual sages so is the Bible. The Bible is read in conjunction with other sacred books.[831] Sugirtharajah takes a middle way which neither throws-out nor embraces the authority of the Bible, but perceives some value in it, provided the Bible is regarded just as fractured and fallible as the reader. He argues,

> If we recognize that the world of the Bible is a fragmented world, its social structure fractured, and its people fallible, then we might start to see more clearly our own fragmented world, our imperfect special systems, and our human weakness… If we listen carefully we may rediscover in their stories and struggles our own anxieties, hopes, and

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[825] Sugirtharajah, 9,10.

[826] Sugirtharajah, 10.

[827] R. S. Sugirtharajah, "Scripture, Scholarship, Empire: Putting the Discipline in Its Place," *The Expository Times* 117, no. 1 (January 1, 2005): 4–5, https://doi.org/10.1177/0014524605058716.R. S. Sugirtharajah, "Known Knowns and Unknown Unknowns: Scriptures and Scriptural Interpretations," in *Theorizing Scriptures: New Critical Orientations to a Cultural Phenomenon*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush (New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 63.

[828] R. S. Sugirtharajah, "The Bible and Its Asian Reader," *Biblical Interpretation* 1, no. 1 (1993): 55.

[829] Sugirtharajah, "Texts Are Always with You: Christians and Their Bibles," 11.

[830] Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 257–58.

[831] Sugirtharajah, *Jesus in Asia*, Conclusion: Our Jesus, Their Jesus, Ebook format.

questions. The document may not possess the answers, but they may encourage us in the present and excite our imagination to act creatively and map out an open future.[832]

4.3.3 Function of Scripture

In a postcolonial hermeneutics, Biblical narratives are not treated as authoritative moral and spiritual resources but are revalued as sources of colonial contacts, and means of subjugation. For Sugirtharajah, postcolonial hermeneutics treats the texts as a means of subjugation. Hence, texts are "… a system of codes which interpreters must disentangle in order to reveal the hidden power relations and ideologies lurking in supposedly innocent narratives."[833] Sugirtharajah anticipates that his hermeneutical proposal will reconstruct and give a voice to suppressed voices. Suppressed voices in postcolonial concerns include people who have struggled in the past and the present, it is sympathetic to the subaltern, and feminine concerns engrained in the text.[834] Sugirtharajah anticipates that postcolonial hermeneutics will study the Bible and "…revalue the colonial ideology… It will scour the biblical pages for how colonial intentions and assumptions informed and influenced the production of the text. It will attempt to resurrect lost voices and causes which are distorted or silenced in the canonical texts."[835]

Further, the function of the word 'scripture' in the postcolonial context is understood differently in each faith community, argues Sugirtharajah. He substantiates it by taking an example from A.K. Ramanujan, who perceives the authority of Ramayana (Hindu scripture) as iconic, indexical and symbolic. He explains these terms. "The iconic refers to a series of translations clustering around common themes; the indexical text is the crystallization of the story in different contexts; and the symbolic provides corrections."[836] Consequently, within religious power structures, the authority of scripture can be perceived as "iconic" with other religious texts addressing pressing needs of the human being. The scripture can also be seen as 'Indexical' since several universal themes and subjects in scripture are communicated to different languages and cultures. The scripture can also be perceived as 'Symbolic' because it commands 'radical discontinuities.' Sugirtharajah points to the fact that some religious texts demand worship to God whereas other texts are atheistic in nature. By employing the authority of scripture as proposed by Sugirtharajah, the scripture will not divide the community, the way the West did, but it will consider the truthfulness and validity of all texts available in different faith communities.[837]

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[832] Sugirtharajah, "Texts Are Always with You: Christians and Their Bibles," 12.

[833] Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*, 185.

[834] Sugirtharajah, "A Brief Memorandum on Postcolonialism and Biblical Studies.," 5.

[835] Sugirtharajah, 4.

[836] R. S. Sugirtharajah, "Introduction, and Some Thoughts on Asian Biblical Hermeneutics.," *Biblical Interpretation* 2, no. 3 (1994): 258, in A.K. Ramanujan and Paula Richman, "Three Hundred Ramayanas, Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translations," in *Many Rāmāyanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 22–49.

[837] Sugirtharajah, "Introduction, and Some Thoughts on Asian Biblical Hermeneutics.," 257–58.

4.3.4 Translation and interpretation of the Bible

This section will point out three diverse strategies of Bible translation and interpretation of commentary work in India with colonial motives, and then give a proposal by Sugirtharajah for dealing with colonial influenced methods. Although, the emphasis of the previous Bible translations and interpretations in India was on retrieving the local cultural, traditional, lingual and religious significance in Bible translation, these methods were under colonial coercion to portray the rich heritage of India as 'superstitious, stagnant, abased, and degenerate, and lower than animals' argues Sugirtharajah.[838] Moreover, this translation strategy was paving a way to bring in colonial interference which projected Christianity as an alternate to the evils of the Indian heritage.[839] The colonial motives for Bible translation were not clearly evident so much within the translation but were vividly articulated in the translator's 'prefaces and introductions.'[840]

The three strategies employed for Bible translation and interpretation under colonial influence are the Orientalist mode, the Anglicist mode, and the Nativistic mode. Sugirtharajah does not give a particular time period for these strategies. The subsequent modes of the strategies do not replace or displace the previous ones but they connect and harmonize with one another.[841] The first mode of Bible interpretation in India was the 'Orientalist mode' which was propagated by the Western Scholars, known as Orientalists. The aim of this mode was not just to revive India's 'ancient linguistic, philosophical, and religious heritage' but also to make Indians proud of their cultural, religious and historical legacy.[842]

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[838] R. S. Sugirtharajah, "Textual Cleansing: A Move from the Colonial to the Postcolonial Version," *Semeia*, no. 76 (1996): 8, 9; Sugirtharajah further notes Ward's description of Indians as "barbaric, submissive, ignorant, intellectually 'far lower than that of our ancestors,' irrational, and possessing 'no powers, except those of the animal.'" On the contrary, he described the colonizer as superior, saying, "Great Britain is the only country upon earth, from which the intellectual and moral improvement of India could have been expected." William Ward, *A View of the History, Literature, and Mythology of the Hindus: Including a Minute Description of Their Manners and Customs and Translations from Their Principal Work*, vol. III (London: Black, Kingsbury, Parbury, and All, 1820), lii: xxxiv, III: xvii.

[839] Sugirtharajah, "Textual Cleansing: A Move from the Colonial to the Postcolonial Version," 8.

[840] Ward, *A View of the History, Literature, and Mythology of the Hindus: Including a Minute Description of Their Manners and Customs and Translations from Their Principal Work*, III:Lii, xxxiv; Moreover, in cruel words, Ward particularly described Hindus and their religious traditions as, "Multitudes of fables and scenes… of the Hindoo writings, belonging to the histories of their gods and ancient sages, that are disgusting beyond all utterance…" Ward, III:III:xxxviii; in Sugirtharajah, "Textual Cleansing : A Move from the Colonial to the Postcolonial Version.," 8–9.

[841] Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism*, 3–14 Sugirtharajah describes these three modes in different themes and titles in his other writings as well. See R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*, 119–21; R. S. Sugirtharajah, "Afterword: Cultures, Texts and Margins: A Hermeneutical Odyssey," in *Voices From the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah, New Edition (London/Maryknoll, NY: SPCK/ORBIS, 1995), 463–69; R. S. Sugirtharajah, "Postcolonialism and Indian Christian Theology.," *Studies in World Christianity* 5, no. 2 (1999): 229–40.Sugirtharajah, "Introduction, and Some Thoughts on Asian Biblical Hermeneutics.," 251–63; Sugirtharajah, "The Bible and Its Asian Reader," 54–66.

[842] Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism*, 4. The Indian converts from the Hindu religion, themselves used the Orientalist mode for bible translation. They gave importance to the Sanskrit language, the use of Hindu Vedic texts, and employed comparative

Sugirtharajah argues that it is partly true that the intention of this mode was to inform the Indian rulers of their cultural heritage. However, the secretive aim was to have firm and lasting control over the Indian people. Moreover, the Indian converts got so involved in retrieving Indian culture that they did not engage with the western classical traditions employed by the missionaries in India.[843] The second mode of Bible interpretation in India was the Anglicist mode, which aimed to counter the Orientalist mode in the colonial era. The method of the Anglicist mode was to degrade and substitute all Indian cultural and religious elements, as well as the Indian narrative approach and replace them with western science and a historical analysis approach.[844] In other words, the aim of the Anglicist mode was to 'integrate the colonial into the culture of the colonizer.'[845] The third mode was the Nativistic mode, which aimed to recover the forgotten vernacular traditional methods of reading, teaching and instructing. The Nativistic mode challenged both the Orientalist mode and the Anglicist mode by reinscribing Scriptures in their own regional languages and indigenous traditions. Although the proponents of this mode were also the converts of Hinduism, they exposed the defects of the Hindu linguistic and religious tradition.[846] Sugirtharajah observes that this mode did give importance to indigenous literary form, and put emphasis on developing theology in regional languages; however, this method isolated the indigenous languages and literary forms from the majority world.[847] He summarizes the consequences of colonialism in two disputing activities in Bible interpretation, namely 'imitate the colonizer' and 'recover indigenous history and retrieve native characteristics'.[848]

In response, Sugirtharajah propagates the following postcolonial strategies of Bible translation and interpretation which do not fall into the trap of power structures. The first interpretation strategy is to value all Asian religious texts. The translation strategy should seek an intertextual approach where the biblical texts

hermeneutics. This method gave a sense of pride to the local culture and a way to communicate Christianity in Indian forms. For example, Krishna Mohan Banerjea, a Hindu convert from Bengal, wrote a book "The Arian Witness" which presented a startling and yet unpleasant revelation. His book argued that the Vedas 'contained hidden mysteries of Christian faith'. The conclusion was even more staggering. Banerjea said that the "…Vedas anticipated the coming of Christ." Banerjea Krishna M, *The Arian Witness* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink, 1875).

[843] Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism*, 4.

[844] For a discussion on, 'Deconstructing western biblical hermeneutics, refer to Anna Runesson, *Exegesis in the Making: Postcolonialism and New Testament Studies* (Leiden, Boston: BRILL, 2011), 51 ff.

[845] Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism*, 8, 9-11. A few forerunners for the Anglicist mode were Alexander Duff and Charles Trevelyan. The Anglicist mode advocated the English language, techniques of historical criticism, secular theologies and seeing the Bible as a unified whole in Biblical theology. The revised hermeneutical emphasis was on biblical exegesis, and to retrieve the original meaning of the text (the Bible). Students of the seminaries in India were introduced to the scholarship of the European scholars, Protestant Reformation tradition, the Enlightenment, and Neoorthodoxy, and other such themes.

[846] For examples, Sadhu Sunder Singh developed his method of reading the Bible from indigenous method of storytelling. Narration or story telling was considered the most influential tool for teaching, moral education and religious explanation. Moreover, the story telling method also interwove ancient Indian tales with biblical stories. Sugirtharajah, 13.

[847] Sugirtharajah, 14.

[848] Sugirtharajah, "Afterword: Cultures, Texts and Margins: A Hermeneutical Odyssey," 463–64.

are linked with Asian religious texts.[849] By doing so, intertextual translation seeks to 'illuminate many gaps and silences in the biblical texts',[850] form 'correct textual and conceptual affinities' between other religions,[851] and also highlight 'dark corners' of the text.[852] In multi-religious contexts, the goal of Bible interpretation should not be a contest between Christianity and other religions. Instead, it should be between 'Satan or Mammon,'[853] versus religious leaders like, Jesus, Buddha, Krishna, Mohammad, etc.[854] To exemplify intertextual interpretation, Sugirtharajah points to George Soares-Prabhu's intertextual hermeneutical study of Jesus' missionary command, and one given by the Buddha to his first followers. The Command of Jesus is given in Matthew 28:16-20, while Buddha's narrative is from Mahavagga 11.1, a section of the Vinaya text of the Pali canon.[855] The following is a sample of intertextual interpretation.[856]

Matthew 28. 16-20	Mahavagga 1.10-11.1
28. 16 Now the *eleven disciples* went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 And when they saw him they worshipped him; but some doubted.	1.10 At that time there were *sixty-one Arahats* in the world.
A	**A**
18 *And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*	1.11 *The Lord said to the Bhikkus, 'I am delivered, O Bhikuus, from all fetters human and divine.*
(cf. Matt. 5.13-16)	**You, O Bhikkus, are also delivered from all fetters, human and divine.**
B	**B**
19 *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,*	*Go now, O Bhikkus, and wander for the profit of many, for the happiness of many, and out of compassion for the world,* for the good, profit, and happiness of gods and human beings.

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[849] Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism*, 92.

[850] Sugirtharajah, 94.

[851] Sugirtharajah, 93.

[852] Sugirtharajah, 94.

[853] Mammon, for Sugirtharajah, stands for 'personal greed, avariciousness, accumulation, and selfishness; and Satan stands for structural and institutional violence. Sugirtharajah, 119.

[854] Sugirtharajah, 119.

[855] The entire chart is a direct quote from George M Soares-Prabhu, "Two Mission Commands: An Interpretation of Matthew 28:16-20 in the Light of a Buddhist Text," in *Voices From the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah, New Edition (Maryknoll, NY/London: Orbis Books/SPCK, 1995), 327–28 For further commentary on this chart, refer to the article. Translation of Hindi words, Arhat: Sanskrit word for 'the one who is worthy' or one who has received Nirvana, Bhikkus: ordained male Buddhist monk, Dhammas: teaching of Buddha, Uruvela: a small village in North India, Bihar, Senanigama: a small village in North India, Bihar. Today, this place is known as Bakraur.

[856] For detailed arguments, refer to George M Soares-Prabhu, "Two Mission Commands: An Interpretation of Matthew 28:16-20 in the Light of a Buddhist Text," *Biblical Interpretation* 2, no. 3 (1994): 264–82.

Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit,	*Let not two of you go the same way.*
20 *teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you;* (cf. Matt. 5.48)	*Preach, O Bhikkus, the Dhammas, which is good in the beginning, good in the middle and good in the end,* in the spirit and in the letter. Proclaim a consummate, perfect and pure life of holiness…
C *and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.'*	**C** *And I will go also, O Bhikkus, to Uruvela, to Senanigama, in order to preach the dhamma.'*

This intertextual study shows that the commands were for the profit, happiness, and out of compassion for mankind. The followers of each command are in need of such "enlightenment" or conversion, so that they can follow the mandate to teach the path of the 'ultimate liberation of humankind.' The commands for the ultimate liberation of mankind were 'conscious of the universality and plurality of mission,' which end with a promise.[857]

The Second Bible interpretation strategy underscores the use of the 'postcolonial English- version' of the Bible**.** Sugirtharajah argues that the English translations are produced by the inner circle of the English-speaking countries, but widely used by others and majority users of English. He refers to Kachru's categories of three different types of users of English. These categories are: the Inner circle (United States, England, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) where English is predominant; Outer circle (India, Nigeria, Pakistan, South Africa, Singapore) where English has an institutional role, and is a language of education, governance and literary creativity; and an expanding circle (Japan, China, Korea, Indonesia) where English has more than an institutional role. English, in the wider circle, is also used for Science and technical purposes.[858] Sugirtharajah further argues that the inner circle works as a 'gatekeeper' of the English language and imposes meaning into the text. A postcolonial English version, however, should focus on 'pluri-centricity' involving all three categories (multi-identities and multi-users) rather than 'duo-centricity' (British or American).[859] Consequently, the postcolonial English translation would focus and include the natives' 'perceptions, metaphors, similes, experiences, and speech patterns'. In simple

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[857] For detailed intertextual interpretation, see George M Soares-Prabhu, "Two Mission Commands: An Interpretation of Matthew 28:16-20 in the Light of a Buddhist Text," in *Voices From the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah, 25th Anniversary (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016), Two mission commands, Ebook format.

[858] Braj. B. Kachru and Cecil L. Nelson, "World Englishes," in *Analyzing English in a Global Context: A Reader*, ed. A. Burns and C. Coffins (London: Routledge, 2001), 11–15., in Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 176.

[859] Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 177.

words, Sugirtharajah anticipates a postcolonial Bible translation as a 'Bible for all'.[860]

The third interpretation strategy is to translate the text in a way which would meet the demands of postcolonial contemporary political, religious and social contexts, and not to treat the past history as a fixed norm for translation.[861] Sugirtharajah argues that since the land is both a theological and political issue in Israel, the Bible verses related to the 'promise of land' should be translated keeping the Palestinian right to the land as well. He points out Genesis 13:15 "For all the land you see I will give it to you and your offspring for ever." Keeping the Palestinians' right to the land, the phrase 'forever' should be translated 'for all your life', which means 'the length of a person's life'.[862]

4.3.5   Vernacular/contextual hermeneutics

Vernacular hermeneutics has a special emphasis in Sugirtharajah's hermeneutics. Vernacular is taken to mean contextual in Sugirtharajah's hermeneutics. Sugirtharajah comments about Vernacular hermeneutics: "Central to the task is recovery, reoccupation and reinscription of one's culture which has been degraded and effaced from the colonial narratives and from mainstream biblical scholarship."[863] Vernacular hermeneutics is significantly prosaic in nature. The emphasis is on the ordinary, everyday language of the downtrodden and exploited ones, a language of the ordinary person, instead of a master's language.[864]

However, the drawback of vernacular hermeneutics is that the missionaries used this method to portray the superiority of Christianity and demonize other religions and their sacred texts. As mentioned before, the Nativist model of vernacular translation was used by the colonialists to compare and contrast Christianity with other religions. Another drawback of vernacular hermeneutics, argues Sugirtharajah, was that it was mainly employed to translate western theological works into the vernacular. Furthermore, in addition, another downside was that the second and third generation of Indian Christians drifted away from their Indian cultural values, not to mention contextualization. However, it was the effort of early converts who maintained the relation between Christianity and Indian Culture.[865]

Sugirtharajah's vernacular hermeneutics claims to "… overcome the remoteness and strangeness of these biblical texts by trying to make links across the cultural divides, by employing the reader's own cultural resources and social experiences to illuminate the biblical narratives."[866] Correspondingly, Sugirtharajah accepts and propagates three possible ways of vernacular

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[860] Sugirtharajah, 177.
[861] Sugirtharajah, 97.
[862] Sugirtharajah, 170.
[863] Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 177.
[864] Sugirtharajah, 177.
[865] Sugirtharajah, 181.
[866] Sugirtharajah, 182.

hermeneutics. The first method is conceptual correspondence, which aims to look for 'conceptual parallels' between the biblical text and texts of other religions. This approach looks beyond the previous method where the focus was on 'historical criticism, Judaic and Graeco-Roman context of biblical narratives.'[867] To exemplify this, Sugirtharajah points to an Indian theologian, K.M Banerjea, who, through his theological work demonstrated conceptual parallels between biblical and Vedic texts.[868] These parallels portray, according to Sugirtharajah, how Christianity is the fulfillment of Hinduism.[869] The second method in vernacular hermeneutics is narrativel enrichment, which takes into consideration "… popular folk tales, legends, riddles, plays, proverbs and poems that are part of the common heritage of the people and place[s] them vividly alongside biblical narratives, in order to draw out their hermeneutical implications."[870] To cite an example, Sugirtharajah points to Samuel Rayans's work on narrativel approach in vernacular hermeneutics. Samuel Rayan takes three Asian religious narratives written by a Jew, a Hindu, and a Muslim, and brings them together for mutual spiritual enrichment. Despite the fact that these religious texts, Job, Arjuna and Gitanjali[871] were written in different time spans and from different religious adherences, yet together these texts demonstrate how sorrow and pain are real and universal.[872] Rayan summarizes this narrative for religious enrichment. He observes,

> In Job, God speaks from the heart of the storm; God speaks only in response to Job's demand — and that, at the course of a lengthy debate among friends. In Gita, God (Krishna) takes the initiative and sustains the dialogue from start to finish. The use of dialogue to express and convey a spiritual experience is itself highly significant. … In the *Poems*, it is only the young poet who sings her sad songs, but many a line is prayer directed to God or to loved ones; and it is not hard to discern behind the songs, within the songs, the answering, the prompting, the enabling voice of God.[873]

The truth about the above three stories presents a reality of our search for God and God's pursuit of us through our complex situations of "… painful, conflict-ridden, historical existence; not only pursuit but struggle and wrestling of human and the divine."[874] The third mode of vernacular hermeneutics is Performantial parallels, which employ the 'ritual and behavioral practices' of a given culture into Bible interpretation and translation.[875] Sugirtharajah exemplifies

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[867] Sugirtharajah, 182.

[868] Banerjea Krishna M, *The Arian Witness* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink, 1875).

[869] For a similar approach to theology in India, see R H. S. Boyd, *An Introduction to India Christian Theology* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994) A few Indian theologians who developed theology under this mode were T.M. Manickam, Paul Gregorious, Anand Amaladaas, and Sister Vandana.

[870] Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 186.

[871] These stories are taken from Bhagavadagita, Bible, and the poems of Gitanjali. Bhagavata Gita is an ancient sacred text, poem, dialogue. The Bible is a sacred text for the Christians. The poems, however, are quite recent and though deeply human and spiritual, are not particularly sacred or religious. The author of the poem was a school girl who died of cancer soon after her 16th birthday. Samuel Rayan, "Wrestling in the Night," in *Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994).

[872] Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 186.

[873] Rayan, "Wrestling in the Night," 110.

[874] Rayan, 110.

[875] Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 188.

this with the common behavioral practice of the powerless tricking the powerful. He specifically mentions the African concept of trickster performed by powerless people and relates it to the trickery of the Hebrew midwives in Exodus 1:15-19 not following Pharaoh's order to kill all male children born to the Israelites. Another example is taken from Genesis 31:35, where Rachel, claiming that she was having her menstrual period, prevents her father thoroughly searching her tent and finding the idols she had stolen and hidden under the saddle she was sitting on.[876]

However, Sugirtharajah is also mindful of limitations of vernacular hermeneutics. Christian Vernacular hermeneutics, too, like western interpretation, sometimes sounds triumphalistic and tends to overlook the dehumanizing elements in their culture. Also, Nativists may also think only in terms of their cultural whole and not beyond. There are possible chances that the theologians and literature produced by vernacular hermeneutics might become isolated due to the scope of their context and audience. In fact, Nativists are told to just focus on their own culture and not to venture beyond their cultural boundaries, hence, they are suppressed.[877]

4.3.6 The Bible reading method

Sugirtharajah's postcolonial Bible reading claims to be broad in his reading spectrum. In fact, hybridizing theology is congruent with postcolonial reading practice. The Bible plays a significant and authoritative role as a hermeneutical agent in Sugirtharajah's hermeneutics. He reads the Bible through various techniques. First, the Bible is read with a method called poaching, wherein a reader 'shreds' or 'plucks' texts into 'small, simplified and specific forms' to address their needs within their own contexts. The reader also 'picks and mixes' the text with other religious texts, finding 'connection and disjuncture' between various sacred texts.[878] In this hermeneutical method, the reader takes a 'plain, natural and obvious meaning' of the text, where the meaning of the text is formed by mutual interaction between the text (the text itself and the context of the text) and the reader (reader and their contexts).[879]

The second technique is a Contrapuntal reading. The Contrapuntal reading reads a text with other texts contrapuntally and not univocally.[880] The original Saidian idea of the contrapuntal reading was "… encouraging the experience of the exploited and exploiter to be studied together."[881] Sugirtharajah translated this into biblical studies. The goal of this reading, maintains Sugirtharajah, is neither to contest for the superior knowledge of truth, nor noting down the deficiencies

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[876] Sugirtharajah, 189.
[877] Sugirtharajah, 194–97.
[878] Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*, 171.
[879] R. S. Sugirtharajah, "Loitering with Intent: Biblical Texts in Public Places," *Biblical Interpretation* 11, no. 3–4 (2003): 576.
[880] R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations: An Alternative Way of Reading the Bible and Doing Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2003), 16.
[881] Sugirtharajah, 170.

and similarities in the texts[882] but rather to "… highlight gaps, absence and imbalances" between the texts.[883] It also guides the reader to see connections and "unveil what might have been buried or underdeveloped or obscured in a single text."[884] Moreover, it widens the hermeneutical horizon by contrapuntal and intertextual reading of the Bible with an aim to "…bring out the convergences, contradictions, discrepancies, oversights and omissions in [sacred texts] and to show that no one text has the finished and once-for-all meaning, and to challenge and to prevent claims of any text possessing the 'last' word."[885] Accordingly, Contrapuntal reading in biblical studies can be done between theological texts. For example, reading Kitamori's *Theology of the Pain of God* with Moltmann's *Crucified God*;[886] or religious texts like the birth of two religious leaders like Siddhartha, the Buddha and Jesus, the Christ. Though Jesus and Buddha were from different cultural, political and religious contexts, through this contrapuntal reading, argues Sugirtharajah, juxtaposed texts and their leaders will not compete but both will be mutually benefitted, critiqued and yet maintain their 'vitality and individuality.'[887] The uniqueness of contrapuntal reading, argues Sugirtharajah, is that it is opposite to previous reading methods of comparison and 'binarisitic manners of thinking'. In fact, contrapuntal reading allows one to read outside one's discipline and gather hints of their hermeneutics. [888]

4.4 An appraisal of Sugirtharajah's postcolonial hermeneutics

The end of the first section seeks to evaluate Sugirtharajah's postcolonial hermeneutics with an emphasis on the doctrine of Scripture. It should be noted that the aim of this section is not to respond to postcolonial critical theory or biblical criticism but evaluate Sugirtharajah's postcolonial hermeneutics focussed on the authority of Scripture. The following section will appraise the general factors related to Sugirtharajah's hermeneutics. At the risk of oversimplification, this section will evaluate general factors related to Sugirtharajah's hermeneutics. These factors, however general in nature, constitute Sugirtharajah's view of the authority of Scripture amidst power structure. The appraisal will assist in understanding the subsequent section pertaining to analyzing Vanhoozer through Sugirtharajah's hermeneutics.

4.4.1   General observations

Sugirtharajah's observations of the colonial era and missionary movement are bold, staggering, and belligerent revelations which cannot be dismissed. Sugirtharajah has painstakingly researched and presented data which proves

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882 Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 117.
883 Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*, 16.
884 Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*, 143.
885 Sugirtharajah, *Troublesome Texts*, 146.
886 Sugirtharajah, 146.
887 Sugirtharajah, 142.To read Sugirtharajah's intriguing contrapuntal reading of Buddha and Jesus refer to, Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*, 142-153.
888 Sugirtharajah, "Catching the Post or How I Became an Accidental Theorist," 174.

colonial and missionary subjugation. The data related to colonial subjugation, which Sugirtharajah has boldly presented, is usually not taught and discussed in mission or church history classes. In fact, the Christian community talks about these colonial atrocities and brutalities, presented by Sugirtharajah, mostly during patriotic day speeches. Sugirtharajah's observation is an essential reminder leading toward a balanced study of mission and church history in the light of the fact that the historical, theological, and literary texts were indeed manipulated by the imperialists. Further, the reminder of the reality that the imperialists legitimized their conquest by representing Indians as savage, illiterate, inept, primitive and incompetent still continues in different forms. For example, the same superior attitude is seen in the development of theology, where Western theology is classified as Christian theology and non-western theology with an attached adjective, as contextual: Asian, African and so on. The required text books in seminaries on theology, specifically systematic theology, are usually from the western world and minimal reference is given to theologians from non-western descent.[889] This pervasive attitude of superiority in hermeneutical discussion is also translated into inequality in the mission field where western missionaries are trusted more than the native theologians/Christian leaders, both in terms of academic theology, authority, funds, and mission responsibility.[890]

However, Sugirtharajah, while trying to ease the power structure tensions, he himself falls into manipulating data and presenting a partial history of the colonial era. He misrepresented the colonial and missionary era by omitting the missionaries' struggle and fight against the imperialists. For example, Buchanan and Carey opposed the British government for promoting Hindu religious celebrations for their monetary gain at the 'festival of Jagganath at Puri in Orissa,' even after knowing about the huge loss of human lives during this festival.[891] Ramachandra agrees with Sugirtharajah's observation about the shameful act of colonial agents. He, however, regrets the inadvertent omission of the courageous acts and social contributions of missionaries and local leaders in the writings of postcolonial theologians.[892] Sugirtharajah has also omitted the impact of the English language in India, while vociferously categorizing it as a colonial apparatus. Although the English language became a kind of official language in India, it improved the education system in India. Several English medium schools, colleges, universities and medical colleges were started throughout India which boosted social, economic, religious, political and intellectual advancement. Gajendran goes a step beyond in accrediting modern education in India by the missionaries to the European Reformation. He further argues that the missionaries' emphasis on 'teaching' was based on and led by the 'Great

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[889] David J. Smith, *A Handbook of Contemporary Theology* (Wheaton: BridgePoint/Victor, 1992); in Tite Tiénou, "Christian Theology in an Era of World Christianity," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), Christian theology as a world endeavor: challenges.

[890] Tíenou voices similar frustration with the Western hegemony in Tiénou, "Christian Theology in an Era of World Christianity," eBook format.

[891] Isaac Gajendran, "Colonialism, Christianity, and Conversion in British India (1707-1857)" (M.Th Thesis, Grand Rapids, MI, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, 2016), 72.

[892] Vinoth Ramachandra, *Subverting Global Myths: Theology and the Public Issues Shaping Our World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2008), Myths of Postcolonialism, eBook format.

Commission'.[893] Sugirtharajah has overlooked the impact of the Bible in the transformation of India brought through British rule. Raja Ram Mohun Roy, whom Sugirtharajah applauds for this hermeneutics, himself accepted that "the British rule in India was a divine dispensation and that there is so much that India can learn from the West."[894] The role of the Bible in the transformation of India is vociferously argued by both Varghese and Mangalwadi. As per the review of the book *Let there be India,*[895] Varghese gives extensive proofs to substantiate his thesis that the Bible contributed significantly to the making of modern India. He supports his argument through startling pieces of evidence. For example, "… based on his analysis of over 100 Indian languages, the author has proved that Bible missionaries as pioneers developed 85 dictionaries, 116 grammar books and 45 Indian universities."[896] In addition, Varghese also refutes the postcolonial argument that calls missionaries colonial agents. He differentiates between the foreign empire and the Bible missionaries, who contributed to the development of modern India. According to the review,

> The book breaks the notion that it was British and other Western foreign invaders who introduced Christianity to India. For example, till 1813, no Christian missionary was allowed to enter the British- controlled territories in India. That is why when William Carey arrived in Calcutta in 1793, he was forbidden to land and had to go to the Danish colony of Serampore.[897]

Similar support comes from Vishal Mangalwadi, an Indian theologian, who points out how different development schemes initiated by the present prime minister of India, such as *Swach Bharat* (clean India), Make in India, and India as a nation have been influenced by the Bible. In fact, he breaks the postcolonial and Hindu notion that Christianity has devalued Indian cultural heritage.[898] Mangalwadi, however, credits the Bible and the work of missionaries in India behind the development of India.[899] Perhaps Sugirtharajah himself has fallen into the temptation of being biased by not refering to scholars like Mangalwadi and hence has downplayed the impact of the Bible through Christian missionaries in making modern India!

Sugirtharajah must be acknowledged for his immense contribution towards publishing literature pertaining to empowering the voiceless. His effort should be applauded for producing anthologies on Asian theology, and postcolonial biblical criticism. He made efforts to give power to the voiceless and gave a theological platform to marginalized voices. The Anthologies and other theological writings

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[893] Gajendran, "Colonialism, Christianity, and Conversion in British India (1707-1857)," 136.

[894] Aleyamma Zachariah, *Modern Religious and Secular Movements in India* (Bangalore, India: Theological Book Trust, 1998), 18.

[895] Babu K. Varghese, *Let There Be India!: Impact of the Bible on Nation Building*, First edition (Chennai, Mumbai: WOC Publishing & Media Concerns, 2014).

[896] UESI, "Campus Link | Let There Be India – A Book Review," accessed August 3, 2017, http://campuslinklive.org/let-there-be-india-a-book-review/.

[897] For more details; Varghese, *Let There Be India!: Impact of the Bible on Nation Building*.

[898] Vishal Mangalwadi, "How the Bible Created Modern India," accessed August 3, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nXZAvXK9eLc.

[899] A similar argument is made for the west in, Vishal Mangalwadi, *The Book That Made Your World: How the Bible Created the Soul of Western Civilization* (Nashville, Dallas, Mexico city, Rio De Janeiro, Beijing: Thomas Nelson, 2011).

produced by Sugirtharajah are filled with Dalit, feminist and pluralist voices, as well as the voices of other native scholars. However, it should be noted that Sugirtharajah's anthologies are filled with voices who have similar ideologies to his. Sugirtharajah's effort to unite and promote these voices is indeed laudable. While disempowering the west for their theological imperialism, Sugirtharajah has totally ignored the voices of those who do not hold to his pluralistic ideology and yet want to speak from a postcolonial perspective. They, too, want to talk about the issues related to Dalits, gender, religions and vernacular hermeneutics. They too want to apply a postcolonial perspective to denominational doctrinal themes such as the uniqueness of Christ, the authority of the Bible, and the role of the church in hermeneutics.[900] In Sugirtharajah's work those who believe in the exclusive authority of Scripture including many in the early Eastern church, South America, Africa and Asia have become voiceless, subjugated and vilified as colonial imitators. Ironically, some of the postcolonial voices claiming to speak for the voiceless have secluded themselves from developing-world realities, and have settled themselves in European and American academic towers. Now they, too, fall into the trap of intellectualizing the pain of the voiceless, hijacking it for their scholarly advancement. Postcolonial writers, including Sugirtharajah, have become postcolonial elites, heavily influenced intellectually by the west and its privileges. This could be both an advantage and a disadvantage to the postcolonial agenda. For example, along with a congenial academic atmosphere, they have access to resources and scholarships that are comparatively easily available in the west in contrast to in Asian countries. So many Asian Christians are still struggling for basic needs like food, clean water, shelter, education, publishing houses, and reading communities. Sugirtharajah is indeed correct in his observation that postcolonial scholarship has not impacted developing-world countries because Asian churches are still dependent on the west for their survival and for their basic needs. Theological scholarship is far from the agenda of many in Asia's churches who do not see any urgency in this matter. A question worth asking is, if western reading techniques and their theological methods are domineering in nature, is it possible for postcolonial biblical criticism, which itself is heavily influenced by western postmodern reading techniques and theological methods, to become a credible voice for the voiceless?

4.4.2   The Authority of Scripture

Sugirtharajah has been vocal in situating postcolonial readings of the Bible as the purpose of his hermeneutics. Most of his books have focussed on rereading the Bible in a postcolonial context. Accordingly, he has proposed to read the Bible in dialogue with other literary genres. Sugirtharajah's proposal is bold and noteworthy. Creating a platform to read the Bible as a historical and religious text will treat the study of the Bible within general hermeneutics. This will further

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[900] Few examples can be seen in Hwa Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas?: The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology*, second edition (UK: Regnum Books International, 2014); Ramachandra, *Subverting Global Myths*; Ken Gnanakan, "Some Insight Into Indian Christian Theology," in *Global Theology in Evangelical Perspective: Exploring the Contextual Nature of Theology and Mission*, ed. Jeffrey P. Greenman and Gene L. Green (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2012), 116–35; Kwame. Bediako, *Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience* (Akropong-Akuapem, Ghana: Regnum Africa, 2000).

open apologetical and hermeneutical avenues in interfaith dialogue for the church. It will also lessen the gap between the church, academia and society. However, the Bible should not be read only as a human book, and that with a postcolonial agenda aiming to dissect imperial agenda. Insistence on a postcolonial reading will withhold the reader from what the Bible is worthy of. This will result in ignoring the scientific, historical, redemptive, and spiritual values of the Bible, and divest the Bible of its theological credibility and magisterial authority. Sugirtharajah's hermeneutic is shortsighted, which in turn deprives Asian, and especially Indian, Christians of their reverence for the Bible as God's Word, inspired and authoritative. To disregard a fresh reading of denominational and theological themes from a postcolonial perspective is like imitating a colonial ruler who silenced the voices that spoke against them. Moreover, postcolonial reading is imprudent in compelling Indian Christians who accept the author-oriented and text-oriented meaning of the Bible, to discover the meaning of the Bible according to their needs. Multiplicity of meaning in the biblical narratives suppresses the meaning intended by the author and/or the redemptive-historical reading of the Bible. Such reader-oriented readings of the Bible are evident in all publications and titles under the umbrella of postcolonial theologies and anthologies. Sugirtharajah does not even anticipate that a fresh rereading of the Bible from a postcolonial perspective will become focussed on an author oriented and redemptive meaning of the Bible. Furthermore, aggressive postcolonial campaigns to reject the reading of the Bible within a denominational presupposition may cause a 'reactive resistance' from native denominational Christians, who strongly believe in the redemptive meaning of the Bible. Hence, postcolonial Bible reading must explore the possibility of re-studying theological issues.[901]

Amidst religious power structure in interfaith dialogue Sugirtharajah's argument to employ 'universal concepts' or 'general revelation' to bring all the religious communities together is indeed the need of the hour. Both western and non-western theologians have emphasized hermeneutical development of theological themes from general revelation.[902] However, western theologians and their non-western imitators have limited their focus to doctrinal issues essentially related to the western ecclesial context. Having said that, Sugirtharajah's proposal cannot be accomplished at the cost of rejecting all theological themes related to the ~~these~~ western soteriological issues and ecclesial communities.

4.4.3   Contrapuntal reading of Scripture

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[901] Robert S. Heaney, "Prospects and Problems for Evangelical Postcolonialisms," in *Evangelical Postcolonial Conversations: Global Awakenings in Theology and Praxis*, ed. Kay Higuera Smith, Jayachitra Lalitha, and L. Daniel Hawk (Illinois: IVP, 2014), eBook format.

[902] A call to focus on general revelation or socio-religious aspect in theology can be seen in, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, and Michael J. Sleasman, eds., *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007); Mohan Chacko, *The Challenge of Doing Theology in India*, International Theological Congress (Kampen: Theologische Universiteit, 1994); Gnanakan, "Some Insight Into Indian Christian Theology"; Paul Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 11, no. 3 (July): 104–12; Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas?*; Tiénou, "Christian Theology in an Era of World Christianity."

Sugirtharajah's argument for postcolonial contrapuntal reading of Scripture within a mutli-religious context, is based on a musical metaphor which seems to bring the Bible and other religious texts together in contextual hermeneutics. According to Muscato,

> …. contrapuntal music is that which contains nearly independent melodies that are each given equal value. Rather than a single melody that is given more weight than the harmony, contrapuntal music introduces multiple melodies that are equally important. Thus, the texture of the piece is not created by supportive harmonies but by the interaction between the sometimes competing and sometimes complimentary melodies.[903]

Originally, the purpose of the contrapuntal reading technique was to read a text alongside the experience of the colonized and the colonizer. Sugirtharajah employs this contrapuntal reading into Bible interpretations amidst religious power structures, giving equal status to all religious texts which compliment, harmonize and coexist. The musical metaphor implied in Sugirtharajah's proposal seems attractive because it claims to put multiple independent texts on an equal platform, and produce religious harmony. This analogy anticipates interactions within multiple texts as complete, interdependent and complimentary. However ideal Sugirtharajah's proposal may sound, it is not workable because he does not clarify how the exclusive claims of absoluteness in any religious text, which usually create religious conflict, can work interdependently, be complete and yet be vital, compliment each other, and yet maintain individuality. Also, drawing a parallel metaphor (contrapuntal music) between music and texts for religious equality seems impractical because a contrapuntal musical piece may have a single and an inherent meaning contrary to the multiple meanings that can be drawn from a text. Moreover, the master or composer of a contrapuntal musical piece is one. Even if there is more than one composer, they intend inherent meaning, harmony, interdependence and complimentary notes. This is wholly unlike religious texts which talk about exclusiveness, absoluteness, distinctiveness and uniqueness regarding their masters, lords and originators which usually create division and violence. Sugirtharajah's contrapuntal reading of multiple religious texts not only destabilizes the authority of Scripture for Christians but it also undermines the authority and distinctiveness of the other religious texts that are professed by different religious groups. Sugirtharajah painstakingly points out the colonial agenda in the text of the Bible, and anticipates that the contrapuntal reading of the Bible with Hindu texts will bring out more contradictions, oversights and discrepancies. Yet, he overlooks the evident "religio-cultural colonial and colonizing tendencies" intertwined within Hindu texts,[904] and other sacred literature.

However, notwithstanding these shortfalls, the value of Sugirtharajah's contrapuntal reading is seen in focusing on universal concepts or general revelation based on different religious texts for religious harmony. And yet pave a way to accept the presence and availability of distinctive, individuality, and unique characteristics of other religious texts; knowing the fact that distinction

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[903] Christopher Muscato, "What Is Contrapuntal Music? - Definition & Texture - Video & Lesson Transcript," Study.com, accessed July 18, 2017, http://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-contrapuntal-music-definition-texture.html.

[904] Simon Samuel, "Postcolonial as a Critical Practice in Biblical Studies," *Doon Theological Journal* 2, no. 2 (2005): 117.

and diversity do not create violence. In addition, Sugirtharajah's contrapuntal reading can be very usefully experimented with in theological, biblical and denominational readings using western and nonwestern texts. For example, reading Kitamori's *Theology of the Pain of God* with Moltmann's *Crucified God* together will be fruitful. During such reading, Western and nonwestern theologies will show convergence, contradiction, discrepancies, oversights, insights, interdependence, and mutual discernment within their theological texts. Such contrapuntal reading will guard any reading of Scripture from monopolizing its reading as universal.

4.5 Assessing Vanhoozer's Hermeneutical Theology against Sugirtharajah's Hermeneutics

To reiterate, the purpose of this chapter is to ask "To what extent does an interaction with Sugirtharajah's postcolonial hermeneutics confirm, contradict or improve Vanhoozer's hermeneutical model, especially with respect to its potential sensitivity to the role of power-structures in theology?" Until now, the chapter has studied and evaluated Sugirtharajah's postcolonial hermeneutics focusing on the authority of Scripture amidst power structures. The following section will now assess how Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology can be confirmed, negated, and improved on as a model for contextual theology, after an interaction with Sugirtharajah's postcolonial hermeneutics. This assessment is focussed on the authority of Scripture amidst power structures.

4.5.1   General remarks

Vanhoozer and Sugirtharajah are significant luminaries committed towards hermeneutical exploration, focusing on the authority of Scripture from different contextual trajectories. They have, however, a common agenda to rescue the Scriptures from power structures. This is evident in their entire oeuvres. Their works have been relevant in contemporary theological debates due to the fact that they have been tirelessly writing and interacting with current situations and scholars. In fact, Vanhoozer referred to Sugirtharajah's hermeneutics while interacting with Third World theologies and pointing out discriminatory elements in the formulation of biblical hermeneutics.[905] They both have been striving to address power structures in theological academia. Both Vanhoozer and Sugirtharajah have faced the challenges posed by modernity and postmodernity. Vanhoozer has been theologizing against challenges posed by the modernist's scientific method of theology, the Roman Catholic Church's parallel authority with Scripture, and the postmodernist's destabilizing of the meaning of the author in the Bible. Sugirtharajah has been belligerently vocal against the modernist scientific method in theology in India, and against missionaries and colonial powers who have used the authority of the Bible as a colonial apparatus. He has thus liberated any text from simply having a single meaning intended by an author. Sugirtharajah and Vanhoozer show that the task of theology is not just

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[905] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), eBook format.

informing but transforming as well. However, they hold a view contrary to each other in relation to the content, source and purpose of this transformation.

4.5.2 Magisterial and ministerial authority of Scripture

At the outset, it should be explicitly mentioned that Sugirtharajah's work vehemently disapproves of or negates the fundamental beliefs which constitute Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology. Sugirtharajah disapproves of Vanhoozer's fundamental belief in the exclusive redemptive claims of Jesus Christ, his theological and Trinitarian hermeneutics, his magisterial and ministerial authority of Scripture, and the ministerial role he gives to ecclesia. The researcher does not endorse the theological views of Sugirtharajah for contextual theology in India. The researcher believes that Sugirtharajah robs the natives of their belief in God, the Divine authority of Scripture and the ministerial role of the church. However, in spite of these two scholars' vehement disagreement on these basic theological beliefs, the research considers some hermeneutical elements proposed by Sugirtharajah to be in line with Vanhoozer's hermeneutical strategies. Although Sugirtharajah and Vanhoozer do not agree on the Christian fundamentals, Sugirtharajah's hermeneutical strategies amidst power structure confirms, and even advances Vanhoozer's hermeneutical strategies.

4.5.3 The use of metaphor: contrapuntal and improvisation

Christian fundamentals aside, Sugirtharajah confirms Vanhoozer's argument to employ metaphors in hermeneutics. Both Vanhoozer and Sugirtharajah have employed contemporary metaphors in their theological formation but in different ways and for different reasons. One such example of a common metaphor is from the music world, that is contrapuntal music, polyphonic and improvisation. Vanhoozer uses improvisation in music and drama to argue for improvisation in theodrama in any local context. Using the contrapuntal music metaphor, Vanhoozer argues for a single meaning of Scripture which can be improvised in a local culture. On the contrary, Sugirtharajah denies any text with a single meaning and instead pursues a harmonizing scheme where texts have multiple coexisting meanings. Although Sugirtharajah disapproves of Vanhoozer's exclusive belief in theodrama, he employs a contrapuntal or counter point music metaphor to argue for a contrapuntal methodology of reading multiple religious texts as one musical piece. Sugirtharajah employs this metaphor to argue for the coexisting of diverse religious texts which would compliment, interdepend, and harmonize. Further to this, another factor that has emerged in Vanhoozer's argument that is consistent with the contrapuntal music metaphor is polyphonic authorship or theological plentitude. This is intended by Vanhoozer to be useful as diverse Christian denominations engage with each other. Sugirtharajah confirms the validity of using this metaphor for highlighting gaps, absences, and imbalances between religious texts, and to challenge the notion that no one text possesses a finished and once for all meaning.[906] Yet Sugirtharajah's use of the

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[906] Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*, 143; Sugirtharajah, *Troublesome Texts*, 146.

contrapuntal metaphor, because of its approximation to Vanhoozer's improvisation metaphor, opens up further avenues for discussion in hermeneutical study. This will move towards a robust hermeneutic for engaging meaningfully in the context of multiple religious power structures. Since the Christian fundamentals of Sugirtharajah and Vanhoozer are contrarian in nature, the implications of the improvisation, polyphonic authorship, and contrapuntal music metaphors used in contextual theology to argue for the authority of Scripture, will contradict.

It remains to be seen why a contrapuntal/polyphonic reading proposed by Vanhoozer is limited to Christian denominational readings of Scripture and not applied to different religious texts. When one assesses Vanhoozer against Sugirtharajah, Sugirtharajah might accuse Vanhoozer of creating a monopoly of the metaphor, English language, the limited use of English terms, and concepts within their theological agenda. Sugirtharajah's approach to employ the prosaic of other religions in contextual theology improves Vanhoozer's approach. It signals further avenues for dialogue with other religions in theology since metaphors play a crucial role in understanding and describing theology.

4.5.4 Theology based on propositions extracted from the Bible

Sugirtharajah shares Vanhoozer's resistance to the West's hermeneutical strategy based purely on propositions and assertions extracted from the Bible. He further confirms Vanhoozer's critical observation that this method is highly influenced by modern scientific methodology and was developed to cater to the needs of the modern period.[907] If Vanhoozer is critical of Protestant theology based on propositions extracted from the Bible, Sugirtharajah confirms and applies this hermeneutical strategy to show how biblical assertions were also used for colonial subjugation and Western Christianity's conquest approach towards other religions. Consequently, Vanhoozer proposes a postpropositionalist strategy in theology which demands more than just propositional revelations mined from the Bible.[908] Similarly, Sugirtharajah is against exclusive assertions extracted from the Bible.

Furthermore, Sugirtharajah would endorse Vanhoozer's questions on the hermeneutical strategy that uses the proposition extracted from the Bible as the only authoritative foundation based on incorrigible and indubitable objective truth. The church is accused of projecting the magisterial authority of the Bible on to other religious interpretive frameworks, which was based on indubitable propositions systematically extracted from the Bible and influenced by modern scientific methods. In Vanhoozer's observation, this hermeneutical approach is called classical foundationalism. Vanhoozer does not reject the Bible as the foundation but proposes the postfoundationalist approach. Vanhoozer considers any indubitable knowledge of the authority of Scripture to be provisional, contextual and fallible. He sees the Triune God as the foundation. Vanhoozer

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[907] This argument by Vanhoozer has been dealt with in the second chapter. for more details, refer to Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

[908] Vanhoozer, 266–78.

argues, "The *postfoundationalist* seeks to "hold onto the ideals of truth, objectivity, and rationality, while at the same time acknowledging the provisional, contextual, and fallible nature of human reason.""[909] Sugirtharajah would disapprove of Vanhoozer's postfoundationalist approach because he rejects the Triune God as the foundation and canon as the fiduciary interpretive framework. He, instead, empowers and gives credit to several years of human religious experience of Christ that includes 'intuition, intelligence, involvement and exposure.'[910] Alongside the use of human religious experiences of Christ in theology and similar contextual experiences of other religious leaders, other sacred narratives are considered to be equal sources for theology (foundation) over only the Bible as the foundation.[911] Although Sugirtharajah is belligerent about the limitation of foundationalism, he himself takes the postcolonial human experience as the universal and foundational source for postcolonial theology. In spite of their foundational differences in theology, Sugirtharajah, in a similar way to Vanhoozer, verifies the limitations both the propositionalist and foundationalist approaches to theology have amidst power structure.

4.5.5 Syncretism and glocalization in hermeneutics

Vanhoozer and Sugirtharajah have vociferously pointed out how the Euro-American understanding has denied any religious syncretistic practices on their part in their secular Western context, and yet have persistently pointed out the religious syncretism practiced within religiously pluralistic contexts.[912] Sugirtharajah affirms Vanhoozer's argument of a necessary intersection between global and local. The terms they use point to a convergence of thought on this point: hybridity, chutnification, glocalization, theodramatic improvisation, and critical syncretism. As shown in the second chapter, Vanhoozer argues for theodramatic improvisation in hermeneutics which demands theological judgment to discern appropriate from inappropriate elements while integrating contextual terms, concepts and metaphors. Vanhoozer's hermeneutics has borrowed terms, concepts, and metaphors from secular philosophies, sports, art, music and literature. He, while maintaining the magisterial status of Scripture, also employed other sources in theological formation. In fact, he allows syncretism or intersection as long as the name of Jesus is central or used as a password in the use of metaphor. He, however, warns that the use of syncretism is flawed when the assumption behind syncretism is that all religions are ultimately about the same God and have the same goal.[913] At this point, Sugirtharajah disapproves of Vanhoozer's methodology. Sugirtharajah has outrightly denied the absolute power or authority of Scripture, belief in one Triune God and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. Instead, he has argued for a system of syncretism where Sugirtharajah treats all religions and religious texts as equal and authoritative such that these

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[909] Vanhoozer, 293.

[910] Sugirtharajah, "The Bible and Its Asian Reader," 55.

[911] Sugirtharajah, "Texts Are Always with You: Christians and Their Bibles," 10–11.

[912] Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All," Exaggeration "the one": religious globalization, eBook format; R. S. Sugirtharajah, "Reconceiving Jesus: Some Continuing Concerns," in *Asian Faces of Jesus*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1993), 260.

[913] Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All," exaggeration "the one": religious globalization, ebook format.

texts from various sacred narratives interact, correct and complement each other. Jesus is only perceived as a wisdom teacher, one among many others. Sugirtharajah's proposal contradicts Vanhoozer's critical syncretism. Yet putting aside the differences in purpose and content of each of their versions of contextualization, Sugirtharajah endorses Vanhoozers' hermeneutical proposal of a religious-secular exchange in theological formation.

4.5.6 Vernacular hermeneutics and prosaic theology

Another Vanhoozerian hermeneutical element, which has found strong affirmation in Sugirtharajah's work, is vernacular hermeneutics. In fact, both, Vanhoozer and Sugirtharajah have felt the necessity of addressing contextual theological concerns with local metaphors, concepts and religious values. A significant section in Vanhoozer's six-fold path to theology is *Sapientia*: prosaic theology. Prosaic theology, according to Vanhoozer, is an attempt to move from contextual elements of Scripture to everyday culture, without laying out a set pattern to go about achieving this. He does, however, propose a route whereby Theodrama reaches into a contemporary local culture through Scripture and Spirit leading the local church in a vernacular performance of the gospel. Moreover, Vanhoozer argues that the vernacular terms, concepts, and vocabulary borrowed should be sanctified before they are employed to interact with the Gospel.

Although Sugirtharajah agrees with the necessity of vernacular hermeneutics, he refutes Vanhoozer's approach. Vernacular performance of the gospel is viewed as a contextualized performance of the catholic church which aspires both to the adequacy of the church's confessions and catholic fidelity to the biblical script. Contrary to this view, Sugirtharajah regards both the ecclesial enterprise and the Bible as colonial apparatuses. In response, he employs cultural resources and socio-religious experiences to illuminate Scripture so that the gaps between the biblical texts and the local culture may be bridged. The linking of biblical texts and cultural divides are achieved through conceptual parallels between Scripture and other religions. It is also done through Narrativel enrichments (biblical narrative and local cultural narrative such as, folk tales, legends, proverbs, poems, etc., are studied together for mutual nourishment) and performantial parallels, (biblical and religio-cultural rituals and behavioral practices are performed together).[914] If Vanhoozer uses theological triangulation (Scripture and Spirit through the Church for vernacular hermeneutics) Sugirtharajah retains cultural narratives to enlighten biblical narratives.

4.5.7 Power structure in executing the authority of Scripture

Sugirtharajah affirms Vanhoozer's observations on power structure in executing the authority of Scripture. It should be underscored that Sugirtharajah's allegation of Western domination in the theological formation of the authority of

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[914] Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 182–86.

Scripture is well observed by Vanhoozer.[915] More so, Sugirtharajah does not hesitate to agree with Vanhoozer's argument in pointing out the contextual and cultural limitation of western theology. He boldly argues that there should not be any linguistic or cultural domination on God, the Gospel, or theology especially by the 'monstrous regiment of systematic theologians.'[916] He, therefore, hopes for contrapuntal or multiperspectival reading of various theologies from western and nonwestern theological voices which will give western theologians a chance to respond to the allegations of imperialism. Moreover, Vanhoozer affirms the value of offering the study of the Bible alongside different disciplines in the secular world so that the theology of the church is always reforming.[917] However, Sugirtharajah's aim in opening the Bible to interpretations in the secular world is that its interpretation could be contested, discussed and repaired rather than working towards a clearer understanding of the meaning of the author of the Bible.

Vanhoozer's criticism of the danger that the theology of the authority of the Bible becomes a tool to dominate is well pointed out by Sugirtharajah. Vanhoozer has also exclusively dealt with power structures and the authority of Scripture in hermeneutics. In a similar argument, Mark A. Noll observes the fact that the authority of Scripture was deeply entangled with power structures. He further shows how individuals, social and religious institutions "… shaped the history of Scripture for political, imperial, and national purposes."[918] Vanhoozer treads cautiously in addressing the nature of the link between the power structures and authority of Scripture in the Protestant and the Roman Catholic Churches. He observes that the Reformation war cry *Sola Scriptura* by the Protestants was not to demean or devalue the authority of Church tradition but to reject the elevation of Church tradition to the same level as Scripture. Vanhoozer is careful not to destabilize the authority of the Church as many Protestant churches seem to do. Hence, he views the Scripture as divine word (covenantal script) and the Church as divine deed (covenantal performance). The authority of Scripture or "*Sola scriptura*" describes a pattern of authority and relationship between Scripture, tradition, and the life of the church."[919] Unlike Sugirtharajah, Vanhoozer rehabilitates the authority of Scripture without denying the significant role of the church. He proposes, "The Bible alone, not the Church, is the supreme norm of faith, and yet this norm is not effective apart from the church."[920] Hence, Scripture has a magisterial role and the Church a ministerial authority. On the contrary, Sugirtharajah, while addressing the colonial power structure and authority of Scripture, dismisses any authority given to one particular center. The Scripture is probed for both implicit and explicit colonial codes, and its authority shared with other sacred Scriptures. Since the church is seen as an agent of colonialism, it too

[915] Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All," Mission in the modern west: Discovery and Domination. eBook format.

[916] Vanhoozer, Our big fat Greek method: What are they saying about western theological thought? eBook format.

[917] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Scripture and Tradition," in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), A future for tradition? eBook format.

[918] Mark A. Noll, *In the Beginning Was the Word: The Bible in American Public Life 1492-1783* (Oxford, New York, Auckland: Oxford University Press, 2016), Public life. eBook.

[919] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 232.

[920] Vanhoozer, 234.

has been disinvested of its authority and multiple readers have been given the final authority for deriving the meaning of a text.

The power to determine the meaning of Scripture, which is the dominant issue in Sugirtharajah, has been significantly addressed by Vanhoozer. Sugirtharajah has persistently pointed out how the authority to determine the meaning of Scripture has been manipulated and misrepresented by the West and their colonial agents in India. Vanhoozer agrees with Sugirtharajah's observation about the marginality and the oppression of a reader.[921] Although Vanhoozer is congruous with Sugirtharajah's concern in addressing the role of a reader in contextual theology, Vanhoozer is opposed to Sugirtharajah's insistence on laying sole authority on a reader in determining the meaning of Scripture. Vanhoozer, however, responds to the fact that the postcolonialist, like the postmodernist, believes in non-realism, is skeptical of metanarratives, believes in the death of the author, and sees no correspondence between the stable meaning of the author and human language and thought. Vanhoozer, therefore, retains the authority of the author yet concurrently assigns the reader a significant place in determining the meaning of Scripture. Vanhoozer addressed this hermeneutical conundrum by resuscitating the author, revitalizing the meaning of the text and reforming the reader.[922] The argument will not be rehearsed here. Suffice it to say, Vanhoozer invokes Searles' 'Speech-act theory', Ricoeur's 'Language as discourse', and Habermas' 'Social theory in terms of covenant of discourse' to respond to the Postcolonial disbelief in the authority of the author of the Scripture. Vanhoozer does not deny the role of the reader in decoding the meaning of Scripture. He anticipates the readers will be saints or church believers who will be led the by the Holy Spirit. Vanhoozer argues,

> Theological triangulation coordinates (1) what the Father has done, is doing, and will do in Christ (i.e., theodramatic ontology, because God is being-in-communicative-activity), (2) the Scriptures that authoritatively attest what is and will be "in Christ" (i.e., theodramatic epistemology), and (3) the way the Spirit guides the church and the ways it must speak and act in order to correspond to its being in Christ (i.e., theodramatic ethics).[923]

Consequently, contrary to Sugirtharajah, Vanhoozer empowers a reader in decoding the meaning of Scripture only as a community of saints.

4.6 A summary of the findings and conclusion

This chapter assessed Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology against Sugirtharajah's postcolonial hermeneutics. The focus of the assessment was the authority of Scripture amidst power structures. Power structure in the research is

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[921] Refer to chapter four: Undoing the reader: Contextuality and ideology, in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*, Anniversary edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009).

[922] Vanhoozer, chapters 5-7.

[923] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Three (or More) Ways of Triangulating Theology: On the Very Idea of a Trinitarian System," in *Revisioning, Renewing, Rediscovering the Triune Center: Essays in Honor of Stanley J. Grenz*, ed. Derek J. Tidball, Brian S. Harris, and Jason S. Sexton (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2014), The formal principle. eBook format.

perceived within multi religiosity and the tussle between native and Western roles in theological formation. The chapter first studied Sugirtharajah's postcolonial hermeneutics, and afterward assessed Vanhoozer's hermeneutical strategy through Sugirtharajah's hermeneutics.

Ubiquitous Sugirtharajah, who is from Sri Lanka presents his arguments for the authority of scripture from a postcolonial perspective, keeping power structure as the context. His proposal is a hermeneutical bricolage, amalgamating diverse religious narratives, Orientalist and Marxist philosophies, Asian and local marginal voices in theology, the critical assessment of western philosophies, and an aggressive take on the missionary enterprise and their biblical interpretation. Sugirtharajah's hermeneutical strategies claim to investigate, reopen, reread, recover, identify, decenter, question, repair and reconstruct the meaning and the authority of Scripture from its colonial entanglement. In response to generations of colonial power dominance, he attempts to give the deserved right and authority to native interpreters, and diverse sacred and secular narratives.

While focusing on the authority of Scripture, Sugirtharajah believes the Bible to be a collection of books written with the diverse theological and ideological agenda of West Asia. The Bible is perceived as a book with strong ideological, theological and colonial entanglements. The meaning of the Bible is informed, influenced and infused by diverse reading communities such as the church, academia and religiously pluralistic societies. Sugirtharajah empowers the reader to decide the meaning of Scripture. He personally takes a middle path which neither throws-out nor embraces the Scripture as authoritative. As long as it is considered to be as 'fractured and fallible as the reader', he believes in its moral and ethical values.

While marking his hermeneutical route in a postcolonial world, Sugirtharajah reads the Bible contrapuntally with other sacred and secular narratives, employing diverse lingual techniques and translations, as well as hybridization. Consequently, after the mutual interaction between the text and the reader, the reader takes the 'plain, natural and obvious meaning' of the text. In relation to two contextual examples, namely interfaith dialogue and funeral practices, Sugirtharajah focuses on the need of the reader instead of maintaining the magisterial authority of Scripture.

Having assessed Vanhoozer over against Sugirtharajah, the research concludes that Sugirtharajah refutes or dismisses Vanhoozer's fundamental belief in the exclusive claims of Jesus Christ as the redeemer, Theological and Trinitarian hermeneutics, the magisterial and ministerial authority of Scripture, and the ministerial role of ecclesia. Sugirtharajah also refutes Vanhoozer's hermeneutical approach of Christ-centered syncretism or improvisation. While Vanhoozer engages in improvisation with secular voices, he fences it with Trinitarian hermeneutics. Yet, Sugirtharajah departs from Vanhoozer on this point by giving equal status to the voice of other religions in his hermeneutical approach. Sugirtharajah gives equal status to the voices of marginalized and native scholars, other religious texts, and the marginalized voices of other religions, all without any urgency to fence the Gospel. Refuting Vanhoozer, Sugirtharajah gives unquestionable authority to the reader to formulate the meaning of Scripture.

Vanhoozer is committed to the Scripture, and the Holy Spirit through the Church for vernacular hermeneutics.

Disagreement in theological fundamentals aside, Sugirtharajah confirms several hermeneutical strategies proposed by Vanhoozer as relevant for contextual theology. Sugirtharajah affirms Vanhoozer's observations on the limitation of theology based on proposition alone extracted from the Bible and the consideration of these as indubitable foundations for theology. On several points, Sugirtharajah confirms Vanhoozer's argument for the improvisation of theology by employing local metaphors, concepts and vocabulary. However, Sugirtharajah has gone far beyond Vanhoozer's argument by employing metaphors from other religions and marginalized voices of native peoples without any sense of need to guard it from capitulation. Further, Sugirtharajah accepts Vanhoozer's call for vernacular hermeneutics which employs cultural resources, and prosaic/everyday elements alongside biblical narratives. Sugirtharajah affirms Vanhoozer's observation on the monopoly of the West in theological academia. Further, he affirms Vanhoozer's call for the interchange between the East and the West in theological formation. Time and again Sugirtharajah has affirmed Vanhoozer's call to rescue theology and the interpretation of Scripture from the power structure.

Sugirtharajah, along with refuting and confirming Vanhoozer's hermeneutical approach, also improves a few of its elements. Sugirtharajah improves Vanhoozer's call to employ improvisation by placing other religious rituals, practices and native folk tales, legends, and proverbs alongside Scripture. However, Vanhoozer limits the execution of the vernacular approach to theology within the local Church and calls for it to fall in line with the ecumenical creeds and confessions of the church. Sugirtharajah contradicts Vanhoozer's safeguards, overlooking theological judgment, and the prophetic role of theology.

In conclusion, this chapter continued to pursue the overall research question of the dissertation: In what ways could Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theory contribute towards a theology which is contextually relevant to the Indian context, while faithfully upholding the Reformed authority of Scripture? The investigation of chapter two concluded that Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theory pertinently addresses hermeneutical and contextual challenges all the while remaining within the vision of the Reformed doctrine of Scripture even when moving beyond or post traditional Reformed vision of Scripture. Further, chapter three affirmed that Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology has convincing potential to address the challenges from multi religious context as reasonably assessed through Bediako's hermeneutics.

Now chapter four has investigated: "To what extent does an interaction with Sugirtharajah's postcolonial hermeneutics confirm, contradict or improve Vanhoozer's hermeneutical model, especially with respect to its potential sensitivity to the role of power-structures in theology? Accordingly, the chapter first described Sugirtharajah's postcolonial hermeneutics, focusing on the doctrine of Scripture amidst hidden power structure in a multi religious context. The second part of the chapter assessed Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology against

Sugirtharajah's hermeneutics. Based on the investigation, the chapter confirms that Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology has persuasive potential to address the challenges of hidden power structure in a multi religious context as rationally assessed through Sugirtharajah. Through virtual assessment of Vanhoozer, Sugirtharajah affirms that there are several Vanhoozerian hermeneutical elements, and within the doctrine of Scripture, which are relevant for a multi religious context. Moreover, at several junctures Sugirtharajah improves Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology. However, it should be mentioned that Sugirtharajah contradicts Vanhoozer on his fundamental beliefs in the exclusive claims of Jesus Christ as the redeemer, Theological and Trinitarian hermeneutics, the magisterial and ministerial authority of Scripture, and the ministerial role of ecclesia.

Hence, the investigation of the chapter confirms that Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theory has convincingly addressed hidden power structure in a multi religious context. Further, the research has indicated that Vanhoozerian hermeneutic theology is able to escape the colonial power-dynamics and leaves room for a genuine contextual freedom of improvisation.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF VANHOOZERIAN HERMENEUTICAL THEOLOGY IN FUNERAL PRACTICES, AND THE RELEVANCE FOR THE REFORMED TRADITION IN INDIA

5.1 Introduction

In this study we are looking for a form of hermeneutics that is faithful to the Reformed confession with regard to Scripture on the one hand, and which, on the other hand, has the potential to do justice to a non-Western – in particular an Indian – context of Christianity. The over-arching purpose of this dissertation is, "In what ways can Vanhoozerian hermeneutical theory contribute towards a theology which is contextually relevant to the Indian context, while faithfully upholding the Reformed vision on the authority of Scripture?" The dissertation dealt with two impelling contextual challenges in India, namely, religious pluralism and hidden power structure. Within this context in India, the research also aimed at implementing Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology with funeral practices.

The previous chapters showed that Vanhoozer's theological hermeneutics could in principle meet these criteria. To this end, it was first mapped and analysed. It turned out that it has the ambition to be faithful to the basic Reformed belief about Scripture and at the same time to make it more contextual. This is done in part because it offers openings to apply the Scriptures in various contexts. Vanhoozerian theory was then brought into dialogue with two non-Western theologians. Bediako helped to assess whether Vanhoozer's hermeneutics can be adequate not only in a secular Western but also in a non-Western multi-religious context. Sugirtharajah served to zoom in more specifically on the Indian context and to examine whether the application of a Western theology such as that of Vanhoozer can escape the danger of postcolonial power mechanisms. Both also provided confirmations, corrections and enrichments to the Vanhoozerian model.

In this final chapter, we take two concluding steps that can confirm the fruitfulness of Vanhoozer's hermeneutics. First, we apply his hermeneutics to the practical challenge with which this study began, namely, how Christians deal with funeral rites for those around them who are Hindu. These rituals often bear the mark of the Indian Hindu context. In addition, this proves fruitful for breaking the aporia among Reformed Christians on this point and stimulates the development of forms of burial for Christians themselves, forms which are appropriate to the Indian culture. Subsequently, the second step will be to validate the relevance of Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology in the Reformed tradition in India with special focus on the authority of Scripture.

5.2 A test and implementation of Vanhoozerian hermeneutical theology in funeral practices amidst a multi religious context and hidden power structure

We take two steps towards a concretization of Vanhoozerian hermeneutics – improvisation – for the theme of burial in the Indian context. First, we map out what Vanhoozer himself has said about the Christian approach to contextually determined funeral rites. To this end we use a discussion of secular fantasy funerals that one of his coworkers has given under his supervision and with which he has expressed his agreement. We also map out how Bediako and Sugirtharajah deal with this theme because they have explicitly discussed funeral customs in their own non-Western contexts. For each of them we show how these practical applications are related to their hermeneutical accents.

As a second step, we independently apply the Vanhoozerian hermeneutic method, supplemented and corrected by aspects of Bediako and Sugirtharajah to the questions surrounding burial in India. We divide these questions into three categories:

a. To what extent can Christians develop funeral customs that bear a truly Indian cultural color,
b. How should Christians deal with interfaith burials, for example of a relative whose family includes both Christians and Hindus,
c. To what extent can Christians fulfill their culturally determined task within a fully Hindu funeral.

5.2.1 Vanhoozerian hermeneutical theology in funeral practices

5.2.1.1 A summary of Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theory of borrowing concepts from other religious cultures for improvising funeral practices

Vanhoozer observes that culturally colored funeral rituals have lost Christian seriousness. He points to church history which invested in the fusion of culturally colored concepts and ideas for gospel purpose. He argues,

> We have seen how in church history the company of faith improvised with the conceptual resources at hand in particular contexts, appropriating them for gospel purposes, thereby transforming the dross of secular ideas and cultural material into the gold of theological concepts that minister understanding (contextual sensitivity).[924]

Philosophy and theology are perceived as companions, where 'philosophy: worldly' acts as a guide to 'theology: wordly.'[925] Vanhoozer has argued that if theology can borrow from philosophy, why can't it borrow from

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[924] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 205–6.

[925] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Once More Into the Borderlands: The Way of Wisdom in Philosophy and Theology after the 'Turn to Drama,'" in *Transcending Boundaries in Philosophy and Theology: Reason, Meaning and Experience*, ed. Kevin Vanhoozer and Martin Warner, New edition (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Lund Humphries Pub Ltd, 2007), 52.

religions?[926] However, while dealing with and borrowing religious concepts, Vanhoozer asks if it would be appropriate to say that religions, primitive religions and secular views, are general revelation. Could these general revelations be seen as preparing the way for salvation, similar to John the Baptist?[927] He responds, "Perhaps no more and no less than we can assume that secular worldviews are revelatory or that Plato's philosophy was a preparation for the gospel."[928] Furthermore, in relation to syncretism, he argues, if any view aims to project all religions as one: religious globalization, be it with secular views or religious views, it should be considered defective. The method of borrowing concepts from other religions is not flawed but the intention of intermixing is. This intermixing is the borrowing of concepts from other religions intending to argue "that all religions and philosophy are ultimately about the same thing."[929] Vanhoozer's theological warrant against this approach to intermixing in theology, is similar to Calvin's warrant in the *Institutes of Christian Religion* 1.13.3 where he agrees to employ terms to explain holy mysterious doctrines. He justifies the use of a contextual term to explain Trinity. He responds, "That it is not a foreign term, but is employed for the explanation of sacred mysteries." Vanhoozer argues that the borrowing and mixing of religious and philosophical terms and concepts with theology is permitted as long as the borrower maintains a Christological trajectory – the basic content of Christianity throughout. The borrowing should neither alter nor add to the content, "Jesus Christ," of Theodrama,[930] but "only of rendering what is implicit *explicit.*"[931] Vanhoozer illustrates this with an example from the Indian sport, *Kabaddi*,[932] to describe the criteria of the use of philosophy in theology. He accentuates,

> Theologians can raid the philosophers' territory as well, appropriating various topics for their own purposes and debating topics such as the nature of the world, knowledge and morality. Of course, theologians must say not kabbadi but *Kyrie*, for if their discourse fails to give epistemic primacy … to the story of Jesus Christ, as norm both for the story of humanity and of God, they are out of the game.[933]

Further, Vanhoozer argues that while considering culturally colored funeral rituals, convictions about death, grieving, burial, and life after death must be acted on from the viewpoint of the biblical theodrama (Scientia). Therefore, while creatively developing new forms, compatibility of culturally colored forms

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[926] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 103.

[927] Vanhoozer, 103.

[928] Vanhoozer, 103.

[929] Vanhoozer, 103.

[930] Vanhoozer, 102.

[931] Kevin J Vanhoozer, "Into the Great 'Beyond': A Theologian's Response to the Marshall Plan," in *Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology*, by I. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids, MI./Milton Keynes, Bucks, UK: Baker Academic; Paternoster, 2004), 89.

[932] In Kabaddi, two teams occupy opposite halves of a small rectangular court. Individuals take turns to raid the opposite side in order to win points by touching the members of the opposing team. While the raider is in the opposite team, he has to continuously say "Kabaddi, Kabaddi, Kabaddi" while holding his breath until he returns to his own side of the court. If he fails to return, or runs out of breath to say kabaddi, he is out of the game. Vanhoozer, "Once More Into the Borderlands: The Way of Wisdom in Philosophy and Theology after the 'Turn to Drama,'" 53.

[933] Vanhoozer, 53.

and Christian theodrama must be emphasized (Sapientia). For such improvisation, Vanhoozer gives the concrete nature and guidelines from his hermeneutical theology.

- Be open to differences and yet minding distinctives. Insisting on distinctives does not amount to violence. In fact, recognizing distinctive tenets (differences) is taking other people seriously, which promotes unity.
- Seek, in charity, as far as conceptually and confessionally possible to be at peace with all positions. However, also seek, in clarity, to enumerate the differences that remain.
- Acknowledge others in their differences as this is an ethical imperative for Christians.
- Respect others as God's creation and not based on their belief.
- Be willing to put your beliefs to critical test.
- Remember and accept that our theological formation is always provisional.
- Although both the parties are enriched, the task of theology is to convince others, not through manipulation and violence, but through persuasion.
- Exploring ways for reconciliation can be bought only with a price – our exposure to otherness and negativity, and perhaps also confessing our intellectual arrogance.
- True dialogue demands practice, wisdom, and Christian love.[934]

5.2.1.2 Vanhoozerian hermeneutical theology in funeral practices: A trendy phenomenon for organizing funerals in the United States of America

This section deals with the significance of Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology in funeral practices in western, Christian, and secular contexts. Since Vanhoozer has not dealt with funerals in a multireligious context in particular, the study will be based on a chapter written by Peays, under the mentorship of Vanhoozer. In fact, Peays's essay on "*Fantasy funeral and other designer ways of going out in style*" was written for Vanhoozer's cultural hermeneutics class, and later selected by Vanhoozer after thorough research and consideration. Vanhoozer assures, "My co-editor and I have selected a representative sampling from one hundred and forty-five term papers written over the past five years."[935] This conveys Vanhoozer's significant involvement and concurrence in this subject. Since fantasy funerals are also practiced in other places like Ghana, it should be noted that Peays' Fantasy funeral is conducted within a Western, Christian, and secular context.

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[934] The enumerated guidelines are taken from Vanhoozer's discussion on the nature of dialogue and the dilemma of loyalty-openness. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture & Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, Ill. : Leicester, England: IVP Academic, 2002), 68–69.

[935] Ben Peays, "Fantasy Funerals and Other Designer Ways of Going Out in Style," in *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, and Michael J. Sleasman (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 9.

Observing and interpreting: First, what is a fantasy funeral? Peays describes fantasy funerals as trendy, creative, expensive and imaginative expressions of remembering someone deceased. They utilize things such as personalized caskets and arrange parties themed according to the deceased favourite hobbies, achievements, or personal wishes. This is all done with the end of commemorating a person's death and performing their funeral in a form that is unique to that person. This stylistic way of burying the dead is a new practice, different from the solemn, traditional American (Judeo-Christian) funeral. More importantly, the new trend of conducting funerals is considered to be significantly personal and meaningful to people, and is a way of celebrating the achievements of the deceased.[936]

The second question is, why fantasy funerals? Peays gives various reasons. On the surface, a fantasy funeral is about 'personalized and meaningful' ways of honouring the dead. Since the previous practice was a mostly serious and sorrowful event, the new practice is all about celebrating the uniqueness of the deceased, free from church rituals and religious demands.[937] However, below the surface level, this new practice of funerals in secular America has "led to the removal of God from death and funerals."[938] The funeral practices which used to be in the Church, or church cemetery, and were led by a minister, have now made their way out of the church to funeral homes, where everybody has the freedom to commiserate and commemorate the life of the deceased in their own manner – often, unconventionally with laughter and celebration. The focus of the funeral is to glorify personal achievements and the social status of the deceased.[939] The rise in changed and innovative funeral practices shows how the view of life and life after death has been significantly changing over time. People have a distorted view of death that is reflected in their fantasy funeral practices. Peays points out questions which describe diverse beliefs about death and eternity. Some questions are, "What happens to us after we die? What does it feel like? Stories of bright lights and tunnels, reincarnations, positive energy forces, harps, clouds, and pearly gates are images that represent our thinking about what really happens."[940] Moreover, many assume or hope that their loved ones are still with them, in the form of a spirit or energy force. Some people have gone to the extreme of integrating the ashes of the loved one's cremation into ornaments, and watercolors for permanent impression on their arts. These observations reveal a glaring absence of God and knowledge of eternity, the fear of death, and the wish to deny death's finality. Fantasy funerals, argues Peays, is the last peak on which to distract people from the reality of death.[941]

Fantasy funerals primarily show that the Christian seriousness, comfort and hope surrounding death and burial have disappeared. Death is made less bad and the fact that there is no real solution to death leads to a more compensatory way of finding comfort. This consists of celebrating the life of the deceased and of rituals

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[936] Peays, 209–10, 212.
[937] Peays, 212–14.
[938] Peays, 214.
[939] Peays, 215–17.
[940] Peays, 217.
[941] Peays, 218–19.

that can be meaningful, soothing, comforting and uplifting on an experiential and emotional level.

Scientia: Having said that, how do we respond to such fantasy funeral practices from Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology: a theodramatic understanding? Peays first provides a *scientia approach to fantasy funerals,* which gives a theological perspective on death. He brings forth three significant points. First, he gives a reminder that the Bible does not present death as the original plan for God's creation. God planned to fellowship with humans as perfect beings forever. By disobeying God, human beings were punished, and death is the consequence of sin. Second, death is the judgment of God for disobeying Him. However, death is not the end in itself. Although death is the end of life here on earth, there is eternal life after death. Third, God has been victorious over death through Jesus Christ. Therefore, those who believe in God move forward to a new life by the grace of God. So, there is hope of life after death for the Christian.[942] Thus, instead of celebrating the achievements of the deceased, Christians should celebrate the fact that there is life after death. The central message should not be the celebration of the life of the deceased, but the celebration of Christ's victory over death and of the life that continues in Him after death and once reappeared in the resurrection.

Sapientia: After stating the basic theological facts about death, and life after death, Peays takes a *Sapientia* approach to fantasy funerals, which suggests improvisation with the cultural aspects of death and burial rites. Peays allows for creative cultural practices in funerals, as long as the meaning of death and life after death is centered on the gospel. He mentions a few funeral practices in the Bible, which are just descriptions of funeral practices, that are not meant to be commandments or instructions for a funeral. He argues that these practices described in the Bible could shape the funeral rituals of the church today.[943] He observes that the Bible does not give specific directions for funeral practices. All it gives is a few descriptions of funeral rituals, such as, the body being washed (Acts 9:37), anointed with oil, spices, and perfume (Matt. 26:12; Luke 23: 56), the wrapping of the body from head to toe (John 11:44), an immediate burial (due to the fear of decomposition) in Acts 5:6, and burial in the presence of family and community members. In relation to the funeral ritual of the church traditions, Peays mentions the usual practices of prayer and Bible reading at funeral services in the church, the use of a coffin, the leading of the funeral service by a minister, and attendance by family members and close friends. It was only after the eighteenth and nineteenth century that the funeral practices became extensive, and shifted away from a quintessential Christian tradition.[944] Regarding the celebration factor of the fantasy funeral, Peays suggests that Christians should join in these celebrations, if they want to honor the death of their loved ones in a creative and personal manner. Moreover, Christians should not be too critical about the creative ways of the fantasy funeral practices. The intention behind a fantasy funeral is to honor the loved ones, and to treat the body of the deceased with dignity (because the person was created in the image of God). In fact, a funeral is the best time to celebrate the fact that there is life after death. Although in fantasy

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[942] Peays, 219–21.
[943] Peays, 220.
[944] Peays, 214–15.

funerals, the celebration is for the deceased, the identity of the deceased is then reflected on Jesus Christ, instead of focusing on the personal accomplishment of the deceased.[945] He argues, Christian funeral practices "should include a celebration and appreciation of life, an acknowledgement of Christ's work on the cross as the conqueror of death, and the hope and assurance of the deceased's ascension into heaven with God forever."[946]

An effect of this Sapientia approach is that existing Christian practices become more relative. The confrontation and comparison with practices in other religions makes one realize that also within the framework of the biblical theodrama differences can and indeed have existed. In other Christian contexts, for example, ritual libations sometimes take place, which opens the eyes to the fact that the Bible also mentions a ritual washing of the corpse. It is then not the rite itself that is decisive, but the question of which encompassing drama it functions in and what meaning is performed by it.

In the same way, elements from fantasy funerals can also receive a place in a Christian funeral. Celebrating life can also happen albeit in a changed manner when the identity of the deceased is seen in the connection with Jesus and takes place as sharing in eternal life. The same goes for rituals that emotionally communicate hope and comfort and meaning. To this end, this link must be made openly. The Christian expectation of the future can even deepen these secular forms.

At the same time, it must be identified which elements in fantasy funerals are inherently linked to a view of life and death that is incompatible with the Christian view. These must be left out or replaced by alternatives that remain culturally close but are able to communicate Christian meaning. At the same time, those aspects of the Christian view on death and burial that receive no attention in fantasy funerals must also be communicated in an understandable way. One then can learn from the forms that characterize the fantasy funerals.

5.2.2 Bediako's hermeneutical theology of funeral practices amidst multi religious context

The purpose of this section is to test Vanhoozer's implementation of his hermeneutical theology through Bediako's hermeneutical approach in funeral rites. In order to do so, the research will first study Bediako's hermeneutical approach of this contextual socio-religious issue which is a pertinent issue not only in Africa (specifically in Ghana) but also in other parts of the world, especially India. Subsequently, the next section will test Vanhoozer's implementation of his hermeneutical theology through Bediako's hermeneutical approach.

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[945] Peays, 223.
[946] Peays, 224.

5.2.2.1 A summary of Bediako's hermeneutical theory for inter religious funeral practices

For multi religious contextualization, a few salient features of Bediako's understanding of religion are worth reiterating. They are vital to Bediako's argument on the uniqueness of Christ in a religiously pluralistic society within burial practices. First, Bediako treats African Traditional Religions (ATR) as a substratum of Christianity. Hence, theologizing, for Bediako, must be an interface with other religions (ATR).[947] Secondly, Bediako describes religions not as mere belief-systems but as mediums through which human beings relate and respond to the sacred or the transcendent. Third, religions, including Christianity, are people's 'tradition of response' to reality: a tradition of response as the Holy Spirit discloses it to them.[948] Fourth, Christian affirmations should not be conceived only on the basis of theological assertions. Neither should they be treated as magical spells or mere propositions. Rather, their significance should be recognized in the lives of the people, where people participate in the Truth. Fifth, contextualization is not possible without an interaction with different religious viewpoints and cultures. In fact, biblical affirmations are God's interaction with other religious viewpoints through his people. Hence, to have a meaningful contextualization, Christians must have a serious theological engagement with religious alternatives. The real impact of the uniqueness of Christ is achieved not by Christian claims alone, but through interaction and substantiation with other religions and their lords.[949]

5.2.2.2 Death and Burial in Akan society

The Ghanaian society is known for extravagant and meticulous funeral ceremonies. In fact, extensive funeral ceremonies are a unique feature of the Ghanaian society. Before delving into Bediako's response to the interpretation of death and burial, here is a brief summary of the contemporary burial rituals in the Akan community. The aim of this brief summary is to project how the contemporary burial practices substantiate and persistently confront the interpretation of death and burial in Ghanaian society, both to theologians and pastors.

A website hosted by Religion and Ethics News Weekly mentions that in Accra, Ghana, a majority of the people are Christian but their burial traditions entail high expenses for fantasy coffins and extended burial rituals due to the ATR religious interpretations of death and burial. One of the reasons behind expensive funerals is honoring or even worshipping the ancestors to show the continuous fellowship with the ancestors in the society. Ablade says, "Grand funerals are a way for the living to please the newly departed elder, to continue the communion

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[947] Kwame Bediako, "African Theology as a Challenge for Western Theology," in *Christian Identity in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, ed. M. E. Brinkman and D. van. Keulen (Zoetermeer, Netherlands: Uitgeverij Meinema, 2003), 64.

[948] Kwame Bediako, "'How Is Jesus Christ Lord?' - Aspects of an Evangelical Christian Apologetics in the Context of African Religious Pluralism," *Exchange* 25, no. 1 (1996): 35.

[949] Bediako, 31.

with those who went before and to ask for blessings."[950] He further mentions, "The belief is simply that the ancestors are there and if you're to meet them, you must meet them properly. I mean, his being there becomes a blessing to the family. They will start calling upon him, "Hey, send us something, this week, things are not so good…""[951]

Similarly, Tawiah argues that the structure of Akan religion is such that the community has to appease each element during the death and the burial ceremonies. He argues, "… there are hosts of spiritual forces in any occurrences of death."[952] He points out that this religious structure is headed by the Supreme Being, followed by the divinities, the spirits of the ancestors and the inescapable magical powers. However, the Akan society believes that it is the ancestors who have overwhelming power during death, so much so that they can use 'death threats and punishment' to maintain their family values and laws in the society. Hence, the funeral rites and ceremonies are conducted in five phases: phase-I: imminent death, phase-II: pre-burial rites, phase-III: interment, phase-IV: Grand funeral, phase-V: periodic mourning.[953]

How does Bediako address the social and religious practices accorded to the dead in the society? He does not give full-blown answers however he does give clues. Bediako observes that the efforts of the churches in Ghana do not last long and are not effective because the churches tend to simplify the burial practices without understanding and explaining the meaning of death and burial from a Christian perspective. Hence, the problem of unbiblical beliefs about death and the consequently extravagant rituals to appease the souls of the dead continue.[954] He further argues that only the Gospel of Jesus Christ, a theological approach towards the Ghanaian understanding of death and burial is the answer to this persisting issue in Ghana.[955] Bediako outlines the various reasons behind such death and burial practices in Ghana. First, the prominent place the dead or the ancestors have in society. Second, the pivotal role ancestors play in the activities of the society, such as the ancestors being the mediators for blessing and curse in society. Third, the insecurity or fear of harm caused by the deceased's spirit's power because of failing to perform a proper burial. Fourth, elaborate rites are an attempt to prevent death and fight against its destructive power.[956] Fifth, they are an effort to make sure that there is a proper separation of the dead from society so that the society does not have to face the consequences.[957] Consequently, specific

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[950] Ablade in an interview by Fred de Sam Lazaro. Fred de Sam Lazaro, "Fantasy Coffins in Ghana," Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly, January 13, 2012, http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2012/01/13/january-13-2012-fantasy-coffins-in-ghana/10095/. (Accessed 12 October, 2013)

[951] Lazaro.

[952] Augustine Tawiah, "Critical Contextualization in Ghana: The Case of Akan Funeral Rites and Ceremonies" (Doctor of Ministry, Memphis, Tennessee, Harding University Graduate School Religion, 2006), 42.

[953] Tawiah, 41,45.

[954] Kwame Bediako, "Death and the Gospel in the Ghanaian Context," *Exchange* 20, no. 2 (September 1991): 147.

[955] Bediako, 147.

[956] Bediako, 147–48.

[957] Bediako, 148. Tawiah, "Critical Contextualization in Ghana: The Case of Akan Funeral Rites and Ceremonies," 61.

rituals for the separation of the dead from the society are also incorporated in the funeral rites. Fortes elucidates,

> … mortuary ceremonies, though couched in language and rites that appear to personify the dead, are in fact not directed towards consigning them to, and equipping them for spiritual existence in a supernatural realm, but towards discorporating them from the social structure. At the personal level this resolves the dislocation and assuages the grief of bereavement. But death and mortuary rites, though they must precede, do not confer ancestorhood.[958]

Bediako firmly believes that it is the death and resurrection of Jesus alone which can give a new perspective on death and burial to the Akans. Jesus has declared the victory on the cross over the spiritual realms.[959] In relation to the elaborate rituals and expense, Bediako desires a simplified way of burial. However, he thinks that it is impossible to bifurcate the extravagant rituals from Ghanaian society.[960] Bediako argues that if attention is not paid to the idolatrous burial rituals, the burial rituals can take us away from Christ. However, the matters of death, after life and burial rituals have potential to lead us toward Christ which can assist the Akan 'to serve Christian purpose'.[961] Hence, the role of burial rites is to guide the Christian towards Christ. That is, the focus has to be in providing or offering Gospel content in every part of the burial practice instead of controlling extravagant burial practices. He proposes,

> The Christian response to elaborate funeral observance may not lie necessarily with their simplification, although this will be a welcome development; rather it requires that we take to heart the triumph of Jesus over death, and that we fill our church funeral services in very part with true Gospel content, so that they may exhibit, in all their parts, true Christian meaning, and become occasions of incisive Christian witness.[962]

Another significant factor during the burial rites is the desire to communicate with the ancestors. In one of the funerals of a church leader, the family members during the libation requested the deceased to talk to them in the future. Two important requests made to the deceased were to assure the family that the deceased's involvement in the society would continue and that the deceased would work towards the safety of the society against the evil ones.[963] Bediako, however, places such desire for communication with ancestors under the sovereignty and work of Jesus Christ. Although Bediako does not describe how it is done, he anticipates the possibility of talking to the ancestors but only through Christ. He explicitly asserts that the total dependence for the source of power is in Christ alone, but if Christ so desires, He may communicate through a message from an ancestor.[964]

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[958] Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh/Maryknoll, NY: Edinburgh University Press/Orbis Books, 1995), 218.

[959] Bediako, "Death and the Gospel in the Ghanaian Context," 149.

[960] Bediako, 149.

[961] Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 223.

[962] Bediako, "Death and the Gospel in the Ghanaian Context," 149.

[963] Tawiah, "Critical Contextualization in Ghana: The Case of Akan Funeral Rites and Ceremonies," 64.

[964] Kwame Bediako, "Biblical Christologies in the Context of African Traditional Religions," in *Sharing Jesus in the Two Thirds World: Evangelical Christologies from the Contexts of Poverty,*

Another noteworthy issue in burial rites is related to honoring the ancestors, which is always perceived as worshipping them. Bediako expresses familiarity with this concern which is raised each time the theology of ancestors is discussed. He expresses concern because such investigations tend to portray ancestors as the rivals of Christ. At the outset Bediako clarifies that the Akan do not worship ancestors but venerate them.[965] Bediako compares this same veneration with the Christian practice in the west where people place flowers on the graves, decorate graves with various mementoes, weed the graves, write an obituary in a newspaper saying 'we still love you,' and to preserve a connection with the deceased.[966] Bediako also vociferously denies that this functionally makes the ancestors rivals to Christ. Bediako notes that a fundamental aspect of the burial rituals is about the social relevance of the ancestors.[967] Bediako does not want the respect given to ancestors to be construed as an evil practice, and warns against this. He sees honoring parents/ancestors as an 'extension of the filial relationship in life,' which is affirmed by Christian tradition and the Scriptures as well. Ancestors when honored are not seen as a source of blessing because the source of blessing is Jesus alone. However, the feeling of oneness and relation to the ancestors continues through this veneration.[968] Bediako calls this practice a kind of 'communion with saints,' where ancestors are remembered in the society in prayers. Bediako affirms, "As a Christian, I am not going to worship them. If they are saints, then it is the communion of saints and it becomes part of Christian worship."[969]

Further, concerning the libation of the ancestors in burial practices, Bediako looks up to Fortes who gives a balanced view on this regard. He invokes Fortes, who argues, "… an ancestor's significance consists in his 'continued relevance for his society, not as a ghost, but as a regulative focus for the social relations and activities that persist … as a deposit of his life and career.'"[970] Bediako supports Fortes' view by expressing, "Of all Akan ritual acts dealing with ancestors, there is none which gives as deep an insight into how ancestors are perceived as the act of libation, the pouring down of liquid substance to the accompaniment of an appropriate form of words."[971] Nevertheless, Bediako clarifies that ancestors and their relics are not worshipped as divinities; it is in the act of libation where religious significance is derived, in a similar way to traditional Christian prayer.[972]

Powerlessness, and Religious Pluralism, ed. Vinay. Samuel and Chris Sugden (Grand Rapids, MI.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1984), 115.

[965] Bediako, 119.

[966] Bediako, 119.

[967] Bediako, 115.

[968] Bediako, 115,119.

[969] Bediako, 119–20.

[970] Meyer Fortes, "Some Reflections on Ancestor Worship in Africa," in *African Systems of Thoughts*, ed. Meyer Fortes and G. Dieterlen (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 129, http://lucy.ukc.ac.uk/era/ancestors/fortes2.html., in Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 223.

[971] Bediako, 219.

[972] Bediako, 219.

5.2.3 Sugirtharajah's hermeneutical theology of Burial Practices amidst hidden power structures

In line with the main question of this chapter, the concretization of Vanhoozer's theological hermeneutics in burial rites in India, the present section will describe how Sugirtharajah employs postcolonial hermeneutics in addressing burial practices amidst interreligious power structures.

5.2.3.1 A summary of Sugirtharajah's hermeneutics amidst religious power structures for multi-religious cremation [973]

Before delving into the burial practices proposed by Sugirtharajah, the research will reiterate Sugirtharajah's view on the authority of Scripture amidst power structures within a multi-religious context. This functions as the basis of his proposal for burial practices.

1. Though the Bible contains spiritual elements, it is not final in its authority.
2. The scriptures of other religions should not be vituperated, rather each should be considered unique in its own way.
3. Religious Scriptures should not be contested or compared. Instead, the emphasis should be communitarian exegesis: "All scriptures seek to tell in their own way the story of how they understand the mercies of God and the mysteries of life."[974] The Bible can be engaged in communitarian exegesis– where each member of society can question, correct, and support the other. They are mutually corrected, enabled and challenged by other.[975]
4. Although the religious scriptures are not final, their 'wisdom traditions are universal,' and Jesus can be considered a sage.[976] No religious or cultural tradition should hold a monopoly of wisdom.[977] Hence, wisdom traditions should be 'freely borrowed and modified' from other scriptures and cultures for spiritual enrichment.[978] The wisdom tradition is not only sensitive to the presence of other multi-religious peoples but also addresses the concerns of poor people.[979]
5. These discussions must avoid the extreme use of 'Christological claims', which are extracted from Scripture and built upon by church assertions and traditions. Instead, employing 'restorative hermeneutics' is essential. That is, 'theocentrism' must be restored by invalidating the excessive use of

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[973] For more details, refer to R. S. Sugirtharajah, "Inter-Faith Hermeneutics: An Example and Some Implications.," *Mission Studies* 7, no. 1 (1990): 9–20; R. Sugirtharajah, "Jesus I Know, Paul I Know, but Who Is God? Christology and Multi-Faith Hermeneutics," *The Modern Churchman* 29, no. 4 (January 1, 1987): 28–31, https://doi.org/10.3828/MC.29.4.28; R.S. Sugirtharajah, "Wisdom, Q, and a Proposal for a Christology," *The Expository Times* 102, no. 2 (November 1, 1990): 42–46, https://doi.org/10.1177/001452469010200204.

[974] Sugirtharajah, "Inter-Faith Hermeneutics: An Example and Some Implications.," 18.

[975] Sugirtharajah, 16-17.

[976] Sugirtharajah, 19.

[977] Sugirtharajah, "Wisdom, Q, and a Proposal for a Christology," 43.

[978] Sugirtharajah, "Inter-Faith Hermeneutics: An Example and Some Implications.," 19.

[979] Sugirtharajah, "Wisdom, Q, and a Proposal for a Christology," 43.

Christological claims and focusing on God. Instead of presenting Jesus as a Saviour, Jesus can be presented as a sage and a messenger of God and His kingdom.[980] The wisdom tradition can be a basis to talk about God 'the creator', who is involved with all people and the creator and sustainer and protector.[981]

5.2.3.2 Funerals in a Hindu-Christian context

The contextual concern discussed in this section is funeral practices and power structure in a multi-religious context. Although Sugirtharajah has not dealt with funeral practices exclusively, he, however, endorses Samartha's religiously pluralistic approach to funeral rituals. Samartha and Sugirtharajah have contributed towards a book titled *Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Trends*, edited by Sugirtharajah.[982] Sugirtharajah agrees with Samartha who was asked to participate in a Christian-Hindu funeral. Samartha took the opportunity to read, both from the Bible and Hindu Vedas, during the funeral to comfort, strengthen and reassure the bereaved. Both Christians and Hindus took turns fulfilling their funeral rituals and participated in the ritual by being present in the ceremony. Samartha points out that both Hindus and Christians comforted each other through silence, presence, and prayers, thus rejuvenating the life of the bereaved community and lessening the gap between the church and the temple.[983] This section is based on Samartha's participation in a Hindu-Christian funeral and what he did to cross the religious structural barriers.

The context: The funeral discussed in this section was for a Hindu man who was married to a Christian woman. He stayed Hindu even after his marriage to the Christian woman. His children were members of a church, and he was an occasional attendee. However, the man's desire was that his cremation be done according to the Hindu rites. Since the other members of his family were Christian, both Hindu and Christian people played a pivotal role in the funeral service. Samartha, as a close friend of the deceased and the family, was asked to say a few words and offer a prayer. He compiled a prayer, which was both from a Hindu text (*Taittiriya Upanishad* III: 1)[984] and the Bible. However, he writes that the prayer was indeed Christian because both sets of religious texts talked about God as the source of life and hope after death. His prayer from Upanishad centered on the ultimate reality being the source of life, sustainer of life and giver of life after death. Similarly, his prayer also emphasized that our death, faith and

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[980] Sugirtharajah, "Jesus I Know, Paul I Know, but Who Is God?," 29.

[981] Sugirtharajah, "Wisdom, Q, and a Proposal for a Christology," 43.

[982] Stanley J. Samartha, "Hindu-Christian Funeral," in *Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Trends*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 179–82; Stanley J. Samartha, "Church in the World: A Hindu-Christian Funeral," Theology Today, accessed August 30, 2012, http://ttj.sagepub.com/content/44/4/480.full.pdf+html.

[983] Samartha, "Hindu-Christian Funeral," 182.

[984] The prayer is offered to Ultimate Reality as "that from which everything is born, that by which everything that is born is sustained, and that into which everything returns at the end" Samartha, "Church in the World: A Hindu-Christian Funeral," 481.

hope is grounded in Jesus Christ. He states, "The prayer was unmistakably Christian in content and character."[985]

The Hindu-Christian funeral service: In the Christian approach, the Christians used Scripture, church traditions, costumes and symbols in conducting the funeral. The Christians participating in the funeral read the liturgy (taken from the Anglican tradition of the Church of South India), which comprised of a Bible reading (from John 11:25-26), singing of hymns and a prayer with "spiritual depth, theological strength and pastoral comfort" to the family. Samartha notes that the Christian service was conducted while asserting the "Christian faith and hope in God through Jesus Christ."[986] The Christian hymns sung were English hymns with Western tunes. The priests present were wearing their official robes and clerical collars. The sign of the Cross and flowers were used in the Christian service.[987]

In the Hindu approach to the service: In a traditional Hindu service, the eldest son of the family is required to officiate the cremation ceremony. Since the deceased's eldest son was Christian who did not want to cremate the body, the eldest boy of the deceased's sister who was Hindu, officiated the cremation without any objection from the family. The Hindu family members, too, used Hindu Scripture, religious tradition, culture and symbols to perform the cremation rites.

The Hindu service comprised of a text read from the Hindu scriptures, *Kathopanishad* 1:12.[988] Various Hindu cremation rites were observed. For example, on the right side of the body, near the head, was a broken half coconut with camphor burning in it. On the left side was a brass vessel containing water from the Ganges, and at the foot of the body was an earthen pot with glowing coals. Each participant took some *tulsi* (an herb, similar to basil considered to be a sacred plant), and put a few drops of Ganges water in the mouth of the body, pressed their hands together in the *Namaste* gesture and touched the feet of the deceased. In all this, the Hindu family members neither had a Hindu priest, nor recited any *mantras* from the religious scripture.[989] Women and children, along with the men participated in the service.

Hindu-Christian participation: After the Hindus finished their service, both Hindus and Christians were involved in getting the body ready for cremation. They placed the body on a wooden stretcher, with fresh banana leaves and flowers. The body was then cremated using sparks from the pot of coals. Later, the ashes were collected and taken home.

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[985] Samartha, "Hindu-Christian Funeral," 180.

[986] Samartha, 180.

[987] Samartha, 181.

[988] Nachiketas dialogue with Yama in Kathopanishad 1:12 "In the world of heaven there is no fear whatever, you are not there and no one is afraid of old age. Overcoming both hunger and thirst, and leaving sorrow behind, one rejoices in the world of heaven" Samartha, "Church in the World: A Hindu-Christian Funeral," 481.

[989] Samartha, "Hindu-Christian Funeral," 180–81.

Hybridization: Theological and religious implications: Samartha draws a few theological and religious implications from this Hindu-Christian funeral. First, death is never regarded as the final end of life. This is a commonality of the Hindu and Christian beliefs. Death is a deliverance or transition into the mystery of life, with the perception of its meaning being reflected in the funeral rites. Second, the texts and prayers taken from the scriptures, (the Bible and Veda), and the use of symbols were comforting, strengthening and reassuring to the bereaved of the life to come. Third, both the Christian and Hindu funeral rites had a community dimension. It was a time where many from other faiths were present at the funeral, comforting each other through silence, presence, and prayers. Fourth, both groups were sensitive to the religious commitment of the eldest son who did not want to lead the cremation, and allowed him to hold on to his religious obligations. The funeral rites thus rejuvenated the life of the bereaved community. In fact, both the Hindu and Christian communities claimed to be related to the deceased, both spiritually and biologically. Fifth, the prayer was offered to Ultimate reality (which has an Upanishad reference) and Jesus, revering the convictions and faiths of both communities. The purpose of the prayer was not apologetical nor to vituperate any beliefs, but to comfort human beings who were gathered together in the common bond of grief. Sixth, through this interfaith funeral practice the social and religious gaps between the temple and the church was lessened and bridged.[990]

5.2.4 A test of Vanhoozerian hermeneutical theology with burial practice within a multi religious context and hidden power structure

5.2.4.1 Testing Vanhoozerian hermeneutical theology through Bediako's burial practices amidst a multi religious context

This section will analyze Vanhoozer's burial practices against Bediako's. Bediako confirms Vanhoozer's call for creative/religious ways of burial. Vanhoozer's approach is theoretically sophisticated and based on theodrama, which is aimed at Christianizing the culture. Bediako contradicts Vanhoozer by aiming at the Africanization of the Gospel. Bediako affirms Vanhoozer who has expressed his vulnerability in contextualizing the Gospel. Bediako is in line with Vanhoozer who is theologically vulnerable and sometimes puzzling in his contextualization.

Bediako affirms Vanhoozer's call for Christian theology to borrow contextual terms, concepts, idioms and metaphors from secular or religious contexts in improvisation. Vanhoozer, however, warns that improvising with the help of contextual metaphors should not be confused with mixing and innovating a new gospel altogether. He distances himself from religious globalization which projects all religions as one.[991] Improvisation must follow the Christological

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[990] Samartha, 182.
[991] Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All," 103.

trajectory: Christ being the basic content of Christianity. Bediako confirms Vanhoozer's hermeneutical trajectory, performing both theodrama and the script in a new situation. Bediako affirms the Vanhoozerian method of borrowing terms and metaphors with a Christological trajectory in African Christian theology. Yet, Bediako contradicts Vanhoozer by aiming at a strong continuity between ATR and Christianity which does seem to project religious globalization. Bediako's significant argument about ATR seems to indicate religious globalization when he affirms that the god of ATR effortlessly found access through the Scriptures into the African Christian faith. It should be mentioned, nonetheless, that there are a few explicit assertions by Bediako which affirm Vanhoozer's argument for the content of improvisation: the uniqueness of Christ. During the Akan burial practices, Bediako vehemently argues for the continuous role of ancestors in the society but explicitly asserts that the source of blessing is Christ alone. An emphasis on the source of blessing by Bediako affirms Vanhoozer's emphasis on a Christological trajectory in improvisation. Bediako affirms Vanhoozer by arguing that veneration of the ancestors, or respectable funeral practices is confined to honor and respect for the ancestor and is not tantamount to worshipping them. Further, Bediako affirms Vanhoozer by arguing for maintaining a firm conviction about Christ and the Gospel in contextualization, and yet remaining respectful and sensitive to the context.

In relation to burial practices in a multi religious context, Bediako affirms Vanhoozer's reluctance in allowing extravagant burial rituals. Bediako improves on Vanhoozer by allowing extravagant burial practices only if the gospel is not dominated by the burial rites. Further, Bediako agrees with Vanhoozer who prefers to go without the expensive burial practices, if chosen by the family, however, treating the deceased with dignity, as a person made in the image of God. Bediako affirms Vanhoozer by his insistence on focusing on the biblical meaning of death and burial. Vanhoozer strongly argues that the identity of the deceased be reflected in Jesus Christ. The deceased ancestors took the place of a mediator, which now is completed in Jesus Christ: the supreme Ancestor. Hence, Bediako improves on Vanhoozer by going a step further in stating that Christ is the Supreme Ancestor. He is the conqueror of death and all the principalities and powers, and the hope and assurance of life after death. Bediako confirms Vanhoozer's allowance of creative ways of burial as long as the rituals celebrate and honor the death of the loved ones.

5.2.4.2 Testing Vanhoozerian hermeneutical theology through Sugirtharajah's funeral rituals amidst hidden power structure

Sugirtharajah's endorsement of such Hindu-Christian funeral methods makes him a scholar who is sensitive and sympathetic to a multi religious group. Knowing the fact that the deceased was from a Hindu-Christian context, it is understandable to conduct the funeral ceremony from Hindu-Christian religious texts, prayers, symbols and costumes which revive and comfort the bereaved family. The Hindu-Christian funeral may have brought together family members who were divided into two different religions. Although the bereaved family seemed to be consoled by diverse religious texts, this funeral practice might have confused the family members about the contrary views and meaning of life, and

life after death. Simply assuring them that there is life after death is not enough. It is important to show what life after death is, who the giver of life after death is, and to whom life is given. One can question whether the members who were present at the multi religious funeral ceremony went home religiously comforted and satisfied or confused and perhaps perplexed by being led by two sources of comfort in their bereavement.

Sugirtharajah agrees with Vanhoozer who aims at comforting the bereaved during the funeral. Vanhoozer agrees to comfort not just through the Bible but also through other extravagant cultural ways during the funeral, if it includes the meaning of life, death and resurrection based on the Bible. Sugirtharajah differs from Vanhoozer in his emphasis on the source of peace and comfort to the bereaved. Sugirtharajah employs diverse sacred texts, prayers and customs taken from different religions to console the bereaved family, whereas Vanhoozer trusts Jesus as the sole comforter and giver of life after death. Sugirtharajah affirms and expands on Vanhoozer's endorsement of allowing the bereaved family to celebrate the death of the loved one in a creative manner. Vanhoozer's context is a secular one; he allows fantasy and creativity in funeral and mourning practices. Vanhoozer does not address the challenge of multi-religiosity in the funeral ceremony the way Sugirtharajah does. Sugirtharajah does not rely on Jesus as the sole comforter; he also uses other religious sources for comforting the bereaved family. While arguing for creativity in comforting the bereaved family, Vanhoozer warns not to substitute the content – Jesus – with fantasy and creativity. The theodrama should control and guide the creativity in funeral practices. Sugirtharajah's proposal for a funeral ceremony amidst religious power structures has included Jesus as well as other religious texts and credited equal power to them as sources of comfort and peace. Although Vanhoozer is poles apart from Sugirtharajah in relation to the source and content of the comfort and peace, Sugirtharajah agrees with Vanhoozer on catering to the individual's anthropological, emotional and communal sensitivity during the death and subsequent funeral practices. Sugirtharajah strengthens Vanhoozer's emphasis on neighbor-love as a hermeneutical aspect by emphasizing the equality of interreligious contacts and being sensitive to the monopoly of religious powers while improvising.

5.2.5 The relevance of a Vanhoozerian hermeneutical theology for participation in burial amidst religious pluralism and power structures

Vanhoozer allows the use of metaphors, religious conceptual tools, and creativity in burial practices. Vanhoozer concurs with the use of trendy and creative ways of burial practices as long as the meaning of death, judgment, Christ's victory over death, and life after death as presented in the Bible are not compromised. This is unlike the earlier burial practices of the West, where the Westminster divines and Puritans would bury their dead without any ceremony.[992] A Vanhoozerian argument for burial practice is in line with a Reformed emphasis

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[992] Allen C. McSween, "The Reformed Pastor Confronts the 'Last Enemy,'" *Theology Matters* 24, no. 2 (Spring 2018): 7.

on the hope of glorious resurrection and yet an understanding of grief and funeral practice. Calvin's perspective on the role of church in burial rites will support Vanhoozer. The funeral practices of the pre-Reformation era of the Western church point clearly towards an underlying belief system which viewed funeral rites as offering security to the life after death of the deceased. These funeral practices included deathbed rituals with the dying person before he or she died. They included many church related rites involving a priest: the mass and sermons, singing, the reading of Scripture and intercessory prayers. There were also rites connected to the preparation of the deceased's body for burial including burial shrouding, embalming, preserving the deceased's bones, the decoration of the casket and the manner and placement of the body in it. The resting place of the deceased's body was carefully considered in these rites including the funeral procession and the geographical location of the graveyard, intramural burial, and the landscaping around the gravestone and monuments.[993] It is beyond the scope of this research to show how these pre-Reformation funeral rituals were viewed as contributing to the salvific benefits of the deceased, but it suffices to say that this was a dominant motivation behind them.

There was a significant change of emphasis in funeral rites and rituals in the Protestant Reformation. Calvin and the reformers relentlessly pointed out the danger of any funeral rites in the church which were practiced for the salvific benefit of the dead, absolution from sin, and/or assistance in moving the dead through purgatory. Calvin, Knox and early Scottish reformers considered many of these funeral rituals superstitious and idolatrous, especially mass and intercessory prayers during the funeral rites. For this reason, they did not allow any additional ceremonies at the graveyard or after the burial.[994] Further, they did not consider the priest's presence as significant during the funeral rituals. However, it took time for the people to realise the dangers of the burial rituals Calvin was pointing out.[995]

Yet the Reformation did not have a uniform view of these different funeral rites and post-death rituals. Calvin was against the Lutheran practice of deathbed confession because this ritual was considered unnecessary if the dying person had true faith in Jesus Christ.[996] The impact of Calvin's teaching of election was such that church funeral rites could not play any role in the salvation of the deceased because their fate was already confirmed long before their death. Stannard notes that from the 1580s to 1660s the Puritans at the burial service even considered the prescribed words "we therefore commit his body to the ground in sure and certain

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[993] Robyn S. Lacy, *Burial and Death in Colonial North America: Exploring Interment Practices and Landscapes in 17th- Century British Settlements* (UK, North America, India, China: Emerald Publishing, 2020), Effects of the Protestant Reformation on British Burial Tradition, Burial Rites in Britain Preceding the Protestant Reformation. eBook format.

[994] Gordon D. Raeburn, "Rewriting Death and Burial in Early-Modern Scotland," *Reformation & Renaissance Review,* 18, no. 3 (2016): 256, 257, https://doi.org/10.1080/14622459.2016.1240897.

[995] Raeburn, 255.

[996] Ruth Atherton, "The Pursuit of Power: Death, Dying and the Quest for Social Control in the Palatinate, 1547-1610," in *Dying, Death, Burial and Commemoration in Reformation Europe*, ed. Elizabeth C. Tingle and Jonathan P. Willis (England, USA: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015), eBook format.

hope of resurrection to eternal life" contrary to the doctrine of secret election.[997] In 1661, the Anglican Book of common prayer took off the phrase "sure and certain' from the prayer book.[998]

What Calvin believed and taught about the danger of funeral rites performed by the church in surety of the life after death was clearly demonstrated in the modesty of his own funeral rites. Unlike his colleagues, Martin Luther and William Farel, who were buried in cathedrals near the pulpit, Calvin's body was wrapped in a simple shroud and put in a rough casket.[999] There was no special funeral service held in a church, and his grave was unlisted without any gravestone or distinction.[1000] His body was laid to rest without any pom and show, and without any funeral rites designed to add surety to his life after death. He was simply awaiting the day of the glorious resurrection. His modest funeral rites put on public display what Calvin taught and practiced – confidence in the promises of the Word of God about the day of glorious resurrection without superstition, fantasy or falsehood.

Further, Calvin allows diligent burial practice and moderate grief as a sign of hope and expectation.[1001] In fact, according to Calvin, no grief and no contemplation on death is barbarianism.[1002] Calvin argues that burying the dead with a diligent funeral ceremony is a not a foolish practice but a sign of hope in the resurrection.[1003] He asserts,

> Whenever, therefore, we read concerning their burying the dead, as if they were anxious about the performance of some extraordinary duty, let us think of that end of which I have spoken; for it was no foolish ceremony, but a lively symbol of the future resurrection. I acknowledge, indeed, that profane and degenerate men at that time, in various places, vainly incurred much expense and toil in burying their dead, only as an empty solace of their grief. [1004]

Furthermore, excessive grief and too high of an importance given to burial practice may amount to rejecting the assurance of the resurrection. Calvin argues,

> Now, if Abraham at that time, assigned a limit to his grief; and put a restraint on his feelings, when the doctrine of the resurrection was yet obscure; they are without excuse,

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[997] David E. Stannard, *The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture, and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), Chapter 4: Death and dying, eBook format.

[998] Stannard, Chapter 4: Death and dying, eBook format.

[999] Ryan Griffith, "Hero in an Unmarked Grave: The Unusual Modesty of John Calvin," May 27, 2022, https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/hero-in-an-unmarked-grave.

[1000] Erik A. De Boer, "The Death of a Leader: Calvin Commenting on Joshua in the Last Year of His Life (1563," *Koers - Bulletin for Christian Scholarship/Bulletin Vir Christelike Wetenskap [Online]* 79, no. 4 (December 4, 2014).

[1001] John Calvin, "John Calvin Bible Commentary," Genesis 35 Bible Commentary, v 28, accessed August 23, 2019, https://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary.php?com=clvn&b=1&c=35.

[1002] John Calvin, "John Calvin Bible Commentary," Genesis 23 Bible Commentary, v 2, accessed August 23, 2019, https://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary.php?com=clvn&b=1&c=23.

[1003] Sara Jane Nixon, "John Calvin on Death and Grief," *Theology Matters* 24, no. 2 (Spring 2018): 3.

[1004] Calvin, "John Calvin Bible Commentary," v 17.

Vanhoozer, in his reflection on Peays's argument for fantasy funerals, does not address how to emphasize a Christian perspective of death and resurrection over the importance given to ethical beliefs in a secular context. The ethical beliefs in fantasy funerals, such as honouring the dead, celebrating the life and uniqueness of the deceased, and glorifying the accomplishments of the deceased, lose sight of the biblical meaning of life, death, judgment and life after death. The drama metaphor and improvisation of burial practices in a secular context allow fantasy funerals to portray biblical convictions regarding death, and life after death; however, a strong secular emphasis on the outlined ethical beliefs overshadows life, death, and the resurrection as they flow out of the authority of Scripture. In a secular context, the repercussions of overshadowing the biblical meaning of death and life after death is less evident. However, in a religious context, the repercussions of neglecting or overshadowing these biblical realities would be devastating spiritually (a compromising of faith in Jesus Christ) and socially (being rejected or excommunicated from the Christian community or Church membership). Vanhoozer insists on grief and burial practices in moderation. Yet he has not qualified or specified the difference between profane and diligent burial practices and the boundaries of moderation in burial practices.

At the outset, it should be noted that Vanhoozer is not giving a detailed outline, model, or theology which can be replicated in any situation for participation in burial. Vanhoozer's proposal is organic in nature which means a believer improvises through word and deed, by being faithful to the theodramatic discourse. This approach challenges the predominate theological approach in India which is quintessentially 'receiving-memorizing-replicating.' Receiving-memorizing-replicating, used to be, and still is, a commonly used method of learning in the Indian education system, including theological education. Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology can challenge the existing method which allows a Christian believer to receive-participate-improvise while performing. A person receives Theodrama discourse, participates in the drama of redemption, and performs theodrama by improvising through theological judgment. The following section presents hermeneutical insights for participation in burial.

The dissertation started with stories about uncertainty and confusion in burial practices in a multi-religious context. Vanhoozer points out a new trend of creative and fantasy funerals in the western world and how it can tempt a Christian to drift from focusing on the meaning of death and life in Jesus Christ. This trend is very similar to trendy funeral practices in the Akan culture. Although the western world may be perceived as secular and Akan as religious, the danger of compromise is evident in both contexts. Vanhoozer's approach for participation in burial practices is flexible and organic. There is no one-size-fits-all model of funeral or cremation participation. Christians may use practical wisdom to honour a loved one through a trendy and personal funeral ceremony. However, Christians should not root their identity in fancy trends and superstitions for burial because their identity is rooted in Christ. Vanhoozer, affirmed by Bediako, has emphasized rooting our identity in Jesus Christ. The meaning of life, death, and life after death

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[1005] Calvin, "John Calvin Bible Commentary," v 2.

should be aimed at Jesus Christ. Vanhoozer is affirmed by Bediako, who discourages Christians from creative and trendy funeral practices because of extravagant expenses and the religious views attached to it. Vanhoozer, affirmed by Bediako, has vehemently warned that no burial practice should take the focus away from Christ.

For the Reformed tradition in the Indian context, this means that practical wisdom should guide a person to choose cultural practices for burial or cremation while refraining from practices which demand worshipping ancestors, idols and anything which adds to or subtracts from the content and discourse of theodrama. Since it is difficult to use one model of burial practices in all situations, theologians and pastors (the interpretive community) should work as a dramaturge in writing and analyzing how different burial practices in multi-religious contexts have been carried out, and how they might be done differently so as to keep the theodramatic vision as their priority. The model of burial practices presented by Sugirtharajah in chapter four is significant because he shows how the diverse elements of burial practice are loaded with religious meaning. Sugirtharajah values all religions as powerful and capable of comforting the bereaved family. Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology rightfully disagrees with Sugirtharajah's proposal because he compromises the authority of Scripture and the content of theodrama.

The researcher believes the way forward is by theological judgment and practical wisdom, inculcated and led by theodramatic discourse and improvisation. In the same manner, practical wisdom and theological judgment should be used to improvise cultural burial practices after detaching them from their religious beliefs. This may be called reverse contextualization. Instead of only integrating, theological judgment should be used to guide in disintegrating burial practices from religious beliefs so that a Christian believer can participate in burial in a multi-religious context without compromising the theodrama. The following are a few examples which can be followed by the Christian community in a multi religious context. It should be noted at the outset that this improvisation may differ from person to person. Nonetheless, the following first two examples are presented for a Christian person who is compelled to participate in the cremation of a Hindu family member.

5.2.5.1 The doctrine of death and funeral rites in Hinduism

The research will only focus on Hinduism and Christianity as it offers examples of funerals in a multi religious context. However, the contextualization of funeral practices among other religions are equally significant and challenging.

The objective of this section is not to elaborate Hindu funeral rites, but to pinpoint major steps of Hindu funeral rites so that this section can assist us to contextualize funeral rites in a Hindu-Christian context. The description of the funeral rites will be done within a Hindu North Indian tradition.

Hindu funeral customs are diverse in nature and vary from place to place. However, the basic format is fairly uniform in nature based on Hindu

scriptures,[1006] and additional rites are based on contextual oral tradition. Hence, the rituals will vary according to their context and oral tradition. Before delving into the funeral rites, it is appropriate to describe the basic Hindu doctrine of death, cremation, and grief so that the connection between the doctrine and rites may be known. It will further assist the research to detach the funeral rite from the belief so that contextualization can be done without capitulation.

5.2.5.2 The doctrine of death, grief, soul and body and cremation in Hindu belief.

Death and grief: The Hindu scriptures teach that death is a reality, and a natural part of the process for a person to continue their journey back to earth and to finally be part of the ultimate reality. In this perspective, then, death is unavoidable. Therefore, there is no need for grief. Bhagavad Gita 2:27 (a Hindu Scripture) says, "For certain is the death of all that comes to birth, certain is the birth of all that dies. So in a matter that no one can prevent do not grieve." Jayaram substantiates, "Death is therefore not a great calamity, not an end of all, but a natural process in the existence of a being as a separate entity, a resting period during which it recuperates, reassembles its resources, adjusts it course and returns again to the earth to continue its journey."[1007]

Status of soul and body in death: It is also believed that when someone dies, their soul will be born again. The soul is immortal. The final destination of the soul is its merging with infinite Atman (Brahman) which is moksha (salvation). Maitri Upanishad 6.24 says, "Even as water becomes one with water, fire with fire, and air with air, so the atman becomes one with the Infinite Atman (Brahman) and thus attains final freedom." The body after death, is considered to be irrelevant, or to be simply like worn-out clothes which are changed in death. Bhagavad Gita 2.22 says, "As a person casts off worn-out clothes and puts on new ones, so does the atman cast-off worn-out bodies and enter new ones." Hence, the grieving should not be elaborate because death is inevitable. Bhagavad Gita 2.30 says, "O Arjun, the soul that dwells within the body is immortal; therefore, you should not mourn for anyone." Further, the human soul is in a cycle of death and rebirth which is called *Samsara*. A combination of good deeds, worship and knowledge of God, and the nature of the status of the deceased during death decides the next clothes or body of the soul until its final liberation. In other words, whatever a soul is thinking at the time of death will be attained in the next lifetime. Bhagavad Gita 8.6 says, "Whatever one remembers upon giving up the body at the time of death, O son of kunti, one attains that state, being always absorbed in such contemplation."

Cremation: Based on *Rig Veda* 10.16.1-14 Cremation is an extremely important ritual for Hindus. Cremation is a method of burning the body of the deceased either by wooden pyre or by electric incinerator. It is believed that the physical body of the deceased is offered to the fire god to consume the soul for *samsara*

[1006] Dana Parks, "Hindu Funeral Customs," accessed June 8, 2022, https://funeralsyourway.com/hindu-funeral-customs/.

[1007] Jayaram V, "Death and Afterlife in Hinduism," accessed August 19, 2022, https://www.hinduwebsite.com/hinduism/h_death.asp.

(transmigration). The fire is lit at home and carried to the crematorium to light the pyre. Samarth explains,

> All household fires are turned off when the *homa* fire is burning and must remain extinguished until the mourning period has ended. The reason for this is that the *homa* fire will be carried from home and will be used to light the funeral pyre at the cremation. It is the flames of the crematory fire, along with the sacred mantras, that transform and then transport the offering of the corpse into the world of Yamlok and the *pitr-*ancestors.[1008]

Fire is associated with purity. In cremation, it purifies the soul from harmful ghosts, demons and spirits. Hays validates, "They believe it releases an individual's spiritual essence from its transitory physical body so it can be reborn, if it is not done or not done properly, it is thought that the soul will be disturbed and not find its way to its proper place in the afterlife and come back and haunt living relatives."[1009] Further, correct steps must be taken for cremation because negligence and inappropriate rites may bring harm to the soul. Hays argues that if the cremation process is not done appropriately, it is believed that the soul of the deceased will be disturbed and it will come back and haunt the family members.[1010] Usually the eldest son lights the pyre[1011] but in recent times a few incidents have come to light where daughters have lit the pyre.[1012] During the cremation, it is believed that the son has to crack the skull to release the departed soul.[1013] This rite is called *kapala Kriya*. Cremation is often believed to be a method of releasing the soul from the polluted body and resting the soul in peace.

5.2.5.2 Funeral practices in a multi-religious context: Hinduism and Christianity

The dissertation started on an autobiographical note, where the researcher introduced the subject of the dissertation with the events surrounding his father's death and the following interfaith funeral ceremony. I will end this research on yet another autobiographical note. During the final stage of the dissertation, my mother died. I chose to show my love towards my mother and to honour her by performing a funeral ceremony based on her religious beliefs, yet without compromising my Christian faith. The research will now propose improvised ways of carrying out burial practices within a Hindu-Christian context in three different situations. Each of these three situations fall within both Christianity and Hindu religious beliefs and burial practices.

[1008] Aditi G Samarth, "The Survival of Hindu Cremation Myths and Rituals in 21st Century Practice: Three Contemporary Case Studies" (PhD Thesis, Dallas, Tex, University of Texas, 2018).

[1009] Jeffrey Hays, "Hindu Funeral, Cremation and Varanasi," accessed September 6, 2012, http://factsanddetails.com/world.php?itemid=1343&catid=55&subcatid=354.

[1010] Hays.

[1011] Mark Brewer, "Comprehensive Guide to Hindu Funerals," January 16, 2021, https://www.thelivingurn.com/blogs/news/hindu-funerals.

[1012] Geeta Pandey, "Mandira Bedi: What Hindu Scriptures Say about Women at Cremations," July 21, 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-57894855.

[1013] Samarth, "The Survival of Hindu Cremation Myths and Rituals in 21st Century Practice: Three Contemporary Case Studies," 65.

Context One: In this first scenario the deceased is a Hindu believer and other members of the family are Christian believers.

The son, who will lead the funeral, is a Christian believer. Society members are mostly Christian though some Hindu believers will be present at the funeral rites and rites thereafter until the 13th day. Symbols used in the funeral rites are flowers, white cloth to cover the body, fire, incense, ghee, a stretcher, the Bible, Hindu scripture, water, and a clay pot. The objective of the funeral rites is to honour and respect the deceased by giving a religiously suitable funeral and yet maintaining the distinctives of each faith. Therefore, without capitulating, an attempt will be made to improvise cremation rituals using Hindu religio-cultural practices while detaching them from their religious beliefs, an attempt based on Vanhoozer's proposal.

In order to prepare for such funeral rites, interreligious dialogue between Christians and Hindus is a must. A Christian can feel vulnerable in this situation, and yet should have the courage to ask Hindus to assist in these funeral rites, requesting that only culturally relevant rites be done, and this in such a way that there is no compromising of either faith. The anticipation from both groups is that the Christian believers are not obligated to participate in the cremation, which is Hindu in nature. But the cremation is happening to honour and respect the deceased who was a Hindu believer. Both groups need to participate with love, charity, and honour towards each other, while at the same time not being forced to compromise their respective faith positions. The following is an attempt to outline funeral rites both religious groups can follow. What is proposed is considered sufficient to show respect and honour to the deceased and their wishes. Yet in this improvised funeral ritual there is no worship of idols. This is something which would cause the son and the other Christian participants to disobey the greatest commandment of exclusive worship of the Triune God. Hindu members may wish to follow more detailed cremation rites, yet without forcing the participation of the Christian members. It should be noted that this method is not done due to pressure from society but rather for honoring the deceased.

1. Both groups should have the courtesy to attend the funeral service and grieve with the family irrespective of their faith.
2. The son may decide to trim his hair as a sign of grief before leaving for the crematorium. If he decides not to shave, he can cover his head with a white head-cover as a sign of mourning.
3. Usually, the body of the deceased is brought home and from there it is taken to the crematorium. To shoulder or carry the body on a stretcher to the crematorium is equivalent to virtuous sacrifice in Hinduism. In Christianity, it is simply considered an honour to grieve with the family by shouldering the coffin to the graveyard site. The body is wrapped in white cloth (for men and widows) or red cloth (for married women) and is showered with flowers, perfume and new cloth, as per ritual. In this context, a Christian may also choose to prepare the body by washing it and then covering it with a white cloth, flowers and perfume without including any Hindu rituals. The funeral procession can be a quiet walk to the crematorium by shouldering the stretcher or by using a vehicle to transport it.

4. The paperwork for arranging a place in a crematorium is quite lengthy. Able members of the family can assist by getting permission and doing other legal formalities in the crematorium.
5. At the cremation site, the members can help in preparing the pyre. There are usually some cremation workers but they generally guide the family members in the different aspects of the cremation. However, members present at the cremation site can help by,
    a. Bringing wood from the store room for the pyre.
    b. Setting up the pyre by arranging wood in a such a manner that the fire will consume the body.
    c. Getting the body ready on the pyre for offering to the fire to be lit and the cremation to begin.
6. The son places fire on the pyre without following the detailed rites. He stays at the cremation site until the skull bursts open, signifying that the soul of the deceased has been released.
7. There may not be a strict dress code to participate in the cremation. Generally, white is seen as a color of peace. Members should wear white, if possible, to show the mark of grief and mourning in the family. In Hinduism, the white color is preferable because it signifies the peace of the soul which is set free from the body. It is also seen as a color to show respect to the departed soul.
8. Members present can be part of the funeral procession by standing next to the pyre, praying to their gods/God for the comfort of the family.
9. After the cremation, participants may go back to the house, wash/clean the house and sit with the family to show comfort.
10. Family members can coordinate to bring food for the immediate family members for three days.
11. The son, who led the cremation, may decide to eat boiled food for three days as a mark of grief. However, for a Hindu, this ritual is a sign of the process of the detachment of the soul from the body.
12. After three days, a few family members can walk to the crematorium to collect the ashes and immerse it in a holy river without any proceeding rituals.
13. On the 13th day, members of the family and members of society may join the family at their house for *Tervi*, a simple meal yet omitting the common Hindu prayer. Christians may use this time to have a prayer meeting with Hindu believers. Usually, an invitation is sent for this ritual. On this 13th day prayer meeting: the meaning of death, the afterlife and mourning can be emphasized. The leader of the prayer meeting should bridge the gap between the two religious communities by showing commonality between these two religions in their doctrine and belief about death, afterlife and mourning. It should also be shown how these two sets of beliefs are different and distinctive. Showing distinctiveness should not amount to violence but rather aim for mutual respect and growth in understanding of the different views about death and the afterlife. A leader may read from the Bible and from the Hindu sacred scriptures to support his points. Members participating can speak about the life of the deceased, appreciating the life the deceased lived, what they achieved and how they contributed to society. These can be shown as good things the deceased received from the giver of life: the Triune God. Prayer can be offered to thank God for the life of the deceased and all their achievements, also asking God to comfort the bereaving family. The prayer meeting should not be apologetical in nature but rather focussed on thanking God for the life

of the deceased, and giving the deceased's family peace and comfort, and bridging the gap between the religious communities.

14. Members of the family and the society can help in cooking a meal for the people gathered for the ceremony. All members can participate in the meal.

Context two: In this second scenario, only the son of the deceased is a Christian, while the deceased is a Hindu, and all the other family members and wider community are Hindus.

The son is duty-bound to participate in leading the funeral ritual. There is a Hindu belief that if the son does not light the pyre the soul of the deceased will not rest in peace. A son who is a Christian, should talk to the Hindu family members about his hesitation to participate and the risk this ritual is for him of capitulation involved. It is assumed that the family members will be considerate in not forcing the son, who is from the Christian faith, to worship a Hindu god. However, it has been observed that there is no such method which is purely culturally neutral. There is always a risk. Also, there is no particular format either for purely Hindu rituals or a contextualized ritual. The crematory rituals are mostly based on oral tradition and basic Hindu rites. The son may prefer to walk out of the responsibility because of the danger of capitulation but out of respect and honor to the deceased he should decide to lead the cremation. Here is the improvised funeral practice.

1. All the points included from the previous context.
2. Specific participation of the son:
   a. Lead the funeral procession.
   b. The son may trim his hair in a salon as a mark of mourning. In fact, immediate male family members can do this as well. The son and other family members may cover their heads with white head-cover.
   c. A pot of fire lit at the home of the deceased will be carried to the crematorium and used to burn the pyre.
   d. It is required to submit the deceased's body to his/her god by taking the body around the god he/she believed in. This may be skipped if the Hindus do not insist.
   e. After preparing the pyre, the body of the deceased may be laid on the pyre.
   f. The son may carry a pot of water on his shoulder. The pot is cracked by the family member as a ritual and the water flows from the broken pot around the pyre before the pyre is lit.
   g. After that, the son carries the fire around the pyre and then burns the pyre. There might be some mantras read, but a Christian son can just observe and give fire to the pyre.
   h. After a few hours, the son breaks the skull of the deceased by a long stick or rod. Hindus think that by doing this the soul of the body is released for the next journey.
   i. On the third day, the son comes to collect the remains (ashes) and immerse them in a holy river. This includes a Hindu ritual by a priest, but a Christian son can do it without any Hindu ritual.
   j. On the 13th day, according to Hindu tradition, the son invites both Hindu and Christian members for *Tervi* for thanksgiving, fellowship meal and prayer. The 13th day prayer meeting marks the end of grieving. During this

prayer meeting, the Christian family members may just sit as the observers for the prayer, while other Hindu members can participate by chanting mantras, tying sacred thread on their hand, by pouring ghee on the fire, reading of the scripture and praying for the peace of the soul.

Context three: In this third scenario, the deceased is a Christian, as are the whole family as well as the wider grieving community. The funeral is happening in a Hindu majority society; however, the church takes the lead in conducting the funeral ceremony. This suggested funeral ceremony is an attempt to continue with the Christian way of conducting a funeral service and yet also incorporate some cultural patterns of grief and mourning from its Hindu society. This is done for two reasons. First, a Christian funeral practice that is western in nature may suggest that Christians follow a foreign religion. Second, it may provide a bridge for the gap that commonly exists between Hindus and Christians living together in a society. Christians are not obligated to contextualize the funeral method; however the long-term benefits are significant. It should be noted that the funeral service stays biblical in content even though the cultural elements signifying mourning, grieving, and expressing sympathy will be immediately recognized by their surrounding Hindu neighbours and society members. Since the context is North India, the following is the suggestion of a service with cultural integration.

1. If the deceased is in the hospital, arrangements should be made to bring the body to the home, if the family is unable to do it.
2. An appropriate time for the funeral should be discussed with the family.
3. Roman Catholic churches often sell coffins, so the deceased's church community can help in making arrangements for picking it up.
4. In the meantime, the church can arrange for the grave to be dug. The church can offer to cover the expenses for this to the cemetery authorities.
5. The church should organize food for the bereaved family. This continues for three days until the memorial or thanksgiving service. The Church can ask church members to help.
6. The church members and the relatives can wash the body and dress the deceased in preparation for the funeral.
7. The close male family members may trim their hair as a mark of mourning. Family members and church members can show their grief by wearing white clothes or cover their heads with a white head-covering.
8. The Church can use a few common cultural elements throughout the funeral to show their grief. Among other contextual elements, flowers, scented candles, white shawls are recommended.
9. An initial service can be done at the home of the deceased, the way Hindus do. The following can be the order of service for this home service as led by the pastor or elders of the Church.
   a. Words of encouragement from the Bible. Passages such as Ps. 116:15, Rev. 14:13, Isa. 57:1-2 may be suitable.
   b. Brief explanation of the passage/passages that were read.
   c. Prayer for the family
   d. Singing. People can continue singing until the arrangements have been made for taking the body to the cemetery, waiting for relatives to arrive, and/or waiting for the ambulance to arrive to bring the body to the cemetery.

10. Those not going to the cemetery may have a final opportunity to view the body of the deceased.
11. The body is taken to the cemetery. Arrangements should be made by the church for getting the family to the graveyard.
12. At the graveyard, the pastor and the elders of the church can lead the funeral service. This is done by reading Bible passages and singing.
13. The service at the cemetery and by the gravesite can be as follows:
    a. A brief discourse from the Bible
    b. A final viewing of the deceased by all present.
    c. The coffin is then closed and lowered into the grave
    d. The grave is then filled in and those attending sing until this is complete.
    e. Final prayers can be prayed, the Lord's prayer recited and the benediction pronounced
    f. Anyone leading the graveside service can make an announcement regarding the day and time of the memorial service or thanksgiving service.
14. The Pastor goes back to the home of the deceased, prays with them and then leaves. He makes arrangements for food for the family for next three days.
15. On the third day the memorial service is held. It is believed that Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, therefore, the thanksgiving service is kept on the third day with the assurance that one day those who have trusted in him will also be resurrected in him.
16. The Memorial/Thanksgiving Day order of service can be as follows:
    a. Opening prayer
    b. Singing
    c. Reading Bible passages
    d. Opportunity for family and friends to talk about the life of the deceased, thanking God for him/her. Five or six people might speak.
    e. Short movie on the life of a deceased might be shown at this point if it has been prepared.
    f. Brief discourse from the Bible on the meaning of death and life after death.
    g. Service closes with prayer and the benediction
    h. Either tea or a meal is organized for the people after the service. Church members can assist in cooking a meal for the family.

The above proposals are based on the practical wisdom and theological judgment in improvisation. For example, without importing the full Hindu significance for the various rights and rituals, Christians may grieve by shaving or covering their head as a culturally obvious sign of respect and grief for the loss of a dear one. The eldest son may light the fire of the funeral pyre during the cremation without any ritual, simply as a sign of honorable way of cremation. Furthermore, practical wisdom and theological judgment should guide a Christian person to spontaneously decide when to restrain from objectionable burial practices, where to be a passive participator, or when to improvise the cultural practices. Since there is no set pattern in the Hindu cremation this opens the way for different elements to be adapted, improvised or rejected. Throughout this

entire process the prophetic approach to theology will confront any elements of compromise that arise during burial participation. Since cremation participation in a multi religious context is an emotionally, spiritually and physically draining experience, in this weighty situation Christians must at all times be powered by the Triune God who is the comforter, the guide and the sustainer of life.

Contextualization in India will always leave a Christian vulnerable to an intermixing of religious faiths. A Christian, while contextualizing, always has to be crying out to God, like Naaman, who cried out to the Lord for peace while serving his culture and honouring God (2 Kings 5: 18-19). God assured him of peace and forgiveness during his vulnerability and hermeneutical conundrum.

5.3 The relevance of Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology for the Reformed Church in India

The preceding section discusses the relevance of Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology in funeral practices in a multireligious context. It developed Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology for funeral practices, which was then tested by Bediako and Sugirtharajah. Bediako and Sugirtharajah tested Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology amidst religious pluralism and hidden power structure. This section will not rehearse the critical appraisal of Vanhoozer's theological arguments. Instead, based on the critical appraisal in the previous chapters, this section will now present the relevance of Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology for the Reformed tradition for India. Accordingly, the first part of the section will present insights to maintain the authority of Scripture by reframing the doctrine of scripture with a Reformed vision. The subsequent part of the section will demonstrate the relevance of Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology for the Reformed tradition in India.

5.3.1 Reframed doctrine of Scripture with a Reformed vision

This section will present theological categories which constitute the authority of Scripture employed by Vanhoozer to reframe the doctrine of Scripture with a Reformed vision. Since the Reformed Church in India (RPCI) follows the Westminster Confession of Faith as its confessional document, the research will limit its references simply to the Westminster Confession of Faith while presenting Vanhoozer's reframed doctrine of Scripture. Through this reframed doctrine of Scripture, this section affirms that the Vanhoozerian doctrine of Scripture stands in accordance with a Reformed vision and is relevant for the Indian context.

5.3.1.1 Authority of Scripture

According to the Westminster Confession of Faith:

The authority of the Holy Scripture depends wholly upon God, the author thereof (I.iv). He is the author of all the canonical books, the Old and New Testaments (I.ii). The canonical books of the Old and New Testament are "immediately

inspired" by God (I.viii). Apocryphal books are not divinely inspired, and have no authority in the Church of God, being mere human writings (I.iii). The Holy Spirit speaks in Scripture (I.x)

Vanhoozer reframes the authority of Scripture. He argues that the Scripture is not a book of theological assertions but a discourse of the communication action of God. The Scripture derives its authority from the Triune God and His communication action in history. Therefore, biblical authority constitutes God's revealed information (content) in the words of others such as prophets, kings, apostles, disciples, believers and unbelievers (forms). God used all these various people in his multifaceted communication action in presenting Jesus Christ. The Bible is the authoritative spectacle, but it is multi-focal (diverse literary forms) and not just bi-focal (Old Testament and New Testament).[1014] This results in both the kernel (content) and the husk (literary forms) remaining authoritative together. In Vanhoozer's view, regaining the significance of the authority of the literary forms along with the content not only guides the believer to a better understanding but also guides them to make a theological judgment of the gospel in any given context.

5.3.1.2 Inspiration of Scripture

According to the Westminster Confession of Faith:

The Word of God written, Old and New Testament, are given by inspiration of God (I.ii), immediately inspired by God (I.viii), and the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture (I.x)

Vanhoozer reframes the inspiration of Scripture within the divine communication action of God: Scripture as inspired discourse. He argues that the inspiration of Scripture is the work of the Holy Spirit who commissions, authorizes, and appropriates biblical text by prompting the human authors to say just what the Triune God intended.[1015] The prompting of the Holy Spirit implies witnessing, urging, assisting, recalling to mind, supplying the right word, and articulating. Hence, the process of inspiration is organic. This process does not stultify the Spirit's work rather it considers both the human and the divine contributions, all the while sanctifying the human communicative practices. This reframed definition alerts us to the danger of understanding the Scripture as a supernaturally caused book of eternal truth and depicting the biblical text as a surrogate divine agent.[1016]

5.3.1.3 Sufficiency of Scripture

The Westminster Confession of Faith says:

[1014] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "From Canon to Concept: 'Same' and 'Other' in the Relation Between Biblical and Systematic Theology," April 13, 1994, 113, http://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/sbet/12-2_096.pdf.

[1015] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 227.

[1016] Vanhoozer, 226-227.

Scripture is sufficient for all things for God's glory, Man's salvation, faith and life. (I.vi) It forbids adding new content to Scripture "whether by new revelation of the Spirit, or traditions of men." (I.vi)

Vanhoozer says that Scripture is not sufficient to know everything is to know,[1017] nor every detail about God. However, Scripture is sufficient so that human beings can know enough to identify the work of God in Christ, respond to God, "trust the promises, obey the commands, heed the warnings, sing the songs, believe the assertions, and hope for the ending."[1018] Scripture is sufficient to recount the true story of the world and its relation to God.[1019]

5.3.1.4 Interpretation of Scripture

The Westminster Confession of Faith says:

The infallible rule for the interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself. (I.ix.) Scripture can only be understood by the illumination of the Holy Spirit (I.vi) It is the Holy Spirit Himself who speaks through the written word. (I.x)

The Reformed understanding of the interpretation of Scripture is best understood as *Sola Scriptura*. "Scripture alone means that Scripture is supremely authoritative in (and over) the church."[1020] Vanhoozer clarifies that *sola scriptura* does not mean Bible only, or *solo Scriptura,* in the interpretation of Scripture. Rather, in interpretation, it means a rejection of "the elevation of noncanonical, and hence human traditions that were thought to supplement the revelation given in Scripture."[1021] However, if *sola scriptura* is taken to mean *only Bible* without the church and tradition also involved in the hermeneutics and interpretation of the Bible, then, the Bible has no future, argues Vanhoozer.[1022] Also, in the interpretation of the Bible it is possible to interpret the Bible simply as a human book. Yet the Bible is set-apart as a Triune discourse which entails theological treatment.[1023] The Triune God speaks in and through the Scripture.[1024]

5.3.1.5 Canonization of Scripture

The Westminster Confession of Faith says:

[1017] Kevin J Vanhoozer and Daniel J. Treier, *Theology and the Mirror of Scripture: A Mere Evangelical Account* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), Scripture as the mirror of truth: Canonical reflection, eBook format.

[1018] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 291.

[1019] Vanhoozer and Treier, *Theology and the Mirror of Scripture: A Mere Evangelical Account*, Scripture as the mirror of truth: Canonical reflection, eBook format.

[1020] Kevin J Vanhoozer, "Holy Scripture," in *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (Baker Academic, 2016), Authority: Rightful say so, eBook format.

[1021] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Scripture and Tradition," in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 149.

[1022] Vanhoozer, 167.

[1023] Vanhoozer, "Holy Scripture," Interpretation: Right reception, eBook format.

[1024] Vanhoozer, Inspiration: Strong (Triune) authorship, eBook format.

Under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the books of the Old and New Testament. (I.ii)

Vanhoozer asserts that the canon is much more than a list of books of the Bible; it is a communication action of God meant to be the church's rule for faith and life.[1025] In the canonization of the Scripture, the church does not pronounce or make Scripture canon but acknowledges Scripture as its authoritative script.[1026] Vanhoozer affirms, "The Canonical Scriptures have *primal* and *final* authority because just these communicative acts and practices are the chosen media the Spirit uses to inform us of Christ, and to form Christ in us so that we may speak and act in our own situations to the glory of God"[1027] The canon is a fiduciary interpretive framework for understanding God, the world and ourselves.[1028]

5.3.2 The relevance of Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology for the Reformed tradition in India

The preceding section presented Vanhoozer's insights for maintaining the authority of Scripture by reframing the Reformed doctrine of Scripture. The present section will indicate the relevance of Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology for the Reformed tradition in India.

5.3.2.1 Reformed theology in India must be more than mere propositions extracted from the Scripture

Vanhoozer has argued that Scripture derives its authority from the Triune God, and His communication action in history. Hence, Scripture should be seen as a divine-human discourse. Although the contribution of human authors is mentioned in the Reformed writings and documents, as mentioned in the second chapter, explicit emphasis is not given to the work of God through human authors in producing the Bible. Therefore, an emphasis on Scripture as a communication action of God in history will address some of the superstitions people hold in the Reformed churches, particularly in India. A student from one of my theology classes slept with a Bible under his pillow when he was sick. He was treating Scripture as a talisman, a holy object with a power to offer physical healing. This is common among lay people and is due to the fact that the authority of Scripture is often projected with an overemphasis on the divine nature of the book, so much so that Scripture is often perceived as a magically caused book of eternal truth. As a result, the Bible becomes an object of worship. If a layperson sees a healing power in the Bible, Reformed theologians fall into a host of other difficulties: the trap of bibliolatry, being biblicist, limiting Scripture to proof-texting, and treating Scripture as a storehouse of theological data. The very real danger is that the task of theology is reduced to a systematic arrangement of propositions extracted from Scripture, the Bible being used merely as a source of scriptural data for furnishing

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[1025] Vanhoozer, Canonization: Locating the Triune discourse, eBook format.
[1026] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 229.; Vanhoozer, "Holy Scripture," Canonization: Locating the Triune discourse, eBook format.
[1027] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 237.
[1028] Vanhoozer, 295.

theology. Vanhoozer, as affirmed by Bediako and Sugirtharajah, has rightfully objected to this method of theology, and the reduction of Scripture to mere propositions. All these beliefs about the nature of Scripture and method of theology, therefore harm, limit, and misconstrue the authority of Scripture. Vanhoozer's proposal, in line with WCF 1.IV, will retain the authority of Scripture by believing in it as a discourse, the act of the Triune God in the inspiration of Scripture and not mere propositions.

> The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, **but wholly upon God (who is truth itself)**, the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because **it is the Word of God.**

Consequently, three significant theological insights drawn from Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology can assist in enhancing the Reformed articulation of the authority of Scripture. The first is the belief in Scripture as the involvement or communication action of the Triune God in history. Scripture is not magically given to human beings from above. Scripture is not an abstract collection of writings, but God communicating through polyphonic voices, such as prophets, prophetesses, kings, apostles, disciples, believers and unbelievers in presenting to us the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. The work of the Triune God in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a historical fact. The communication action of God in history offers a great comfort from God, who has a real character, and who is faithfully and incessantly present in the history of humankind. It entails and generates a hermeneutical aim to bear competent witness to what God has done in Christ. Furthermore, the involvement of the Triune God in the inspiration of Scripture puts a value on human writers and their literary skills as they produced the Bible. The Bible is "like every other book because it has human authors. It is unlike every other book because it has God for its ultimate author…."[1029] The Triune God does not contravene but supervenes the communicative intentions of its human authors. God does not undermine the humanity and creative work of human authors. The human authors were not passive mouthpieces in the hands of God but responsible human covenant authors with whom God communicated.[1030] This organic nature of inspiration entails the hermeneutical task of paying attention to literary style, communication skills and contextual realities to understand the author-intended meaning of the text. The communication action of the Triune God in the Bible amidst diverse religions entails exploring and witnessing to Christ in a meaningful way in and through Scripture in diverse religious situations in India.

The second theological contribution from Vanhoozer that can help the Reformed tradition to understand the authority of Scripture is an emphasis on the diverse genres in the Bible. These can bridge the gap between the author and the reader of the text. Literary genres in the Scriptures are varieties of the divine-human speech act, together presenting a comprehensive understanding of the communication action of God. An obvious common factor between the socio-religious context of the authors of the Bible and the readers in the Reformed tradition in India is plurality of religions. For example, in the multi-religious

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[1029] Vanhoozer, "Holy Scripture," Introduction, eBook format.
[1030] Vanhoozer, Holy Scripture amd the God-world relationship, eBook format.

context of India, extracting only exclusive biblical assertions to argue for antithetical or intolerant views towards other religions will flatten the Bible and reduce the comprehensive meaning of Scripture. Yet paying attention to literary forms of Scripture will generate formation, a way of thought and life, and a way of envisaging the mind of Christ so that we can offer a fitting performance of the Gospel to other religions. The form and content of the authority of Scripture has a significant impact on theological judgment used and needed while contextualizing Scripture. For instance, Bediako affirms Vanhoozer's compelling argument for improvisation, contextualizing the meaning of the redemptive work of Christ. Bediako, in a multireligious context, tries to employ improvisation by denoting Hebrews 1:3b into Akan traditional purificatory rituals of *Odwira*.[1031]

In continuation with the preceding points, the third emphasis found in Vanhoozer to enhance the authority of Scripture is to perceive Scripture as more than a collection of principles, assertions and propositions for the mere transmission of knowledge. It is a communication action of God. It is theodrama which includes propositions, greetings, questioning, promising, commanding, asserting, prompting, correcting, healing, sacrificing, raising from the dead, assurance of life after death, and so on. It is not just transmitting knowledge but is a call to participate in theodrama, transformation of the hearer, and to appropriate it into one's own context. Reformed theology in India will be enhanced if theology will be more, not less, than revealed propositions extracted from Scripture. One of the dangers of propositional theology is that if propositions extracted from Scripture can be used to develop antithetical views towards other religions, the same method can be used to argue for religious pluralism as argued by Sugirtharajah in the fourth chapter. Hence, the postpropositionalist approach includes both literary genres and propositions: form and content, or as Bediako puts it "a comprehensive understanding of Scripture," which not only informs us about Christ but forms us in Christ to be competent witnesses to Christ.

5.3.2.2 The Reformed Tradition in India must consider that the Triune God is the foundation of our faith, and the Canon an authoritative fiduciary interpretive framework

The Reformed tradition in India holds on to their theological position that the canon is a textbook of propositional truths that serves as an indubitable and incorrigible theological foundation. Further, the historical character of the truth is considered subordinate or secondary to it as revealed proposition. A Postfoundational approach to theology will address precisely this epistemological overestimation and inconvertible rational certainty. A postfoundational approach to theology will address the danger of the privileging of propositions abstracted from the Bible and in response will direct them to a comprehensive understanding of the Bible's diverse literary genres alongside its propositions. A postfoundational approach to theology will also address their overestimating the foundation set by human reasoning and their consideration of it as a holy grail,

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[1031] Kwame. Bediako, *Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience* (Akropong-Akuapem, Ghana: Regnum Africa, 2000), Reading and hearing the Word of God in our own language. eBook format. Refer to the third chapter for more examples presented by Bediako.

indubitable and incorrigible. The postfoundational approach to theology more fully realizes the effects of the fall into sin on human reasoning. Consequently, a postfoundationalist approach will further assist in reforming their epistemological certainty. A postfoundationalist approach to theology affirms the Triune God as the foundation of both the church and its theological foundation. It trusts the canon as the church's trustworthy interpretive framework and regards theodramatic action to be true, bearing the authentic marks of the Triune God. The Reformed tradition in India should trust the canon as authoritative because it shows a remarkable work of the Holy Spirit, it has noteworthy intra-textual coherence, it corresponds intelligibly with the daily lives of people, and because of the various biblical discourses all displaying a common orientation, who is Jesus Christ. It is faith (subjective) seeking theodramatic understanding (objective). However, this truth is conveyed through ordinary human language and cognition, which is the provisional, contextual and distorted nature of human reason.[1032] Thus, the postfoundationalist approach will check epistemological pride. It will assist the Reformed tradition in India to interact with other religions with charity, humility, modesty and confidence, not just on the basis of indubitable propositions drawn from the Bible, but also in a demonstrable wisdom inculcated by Scripture based on the only true God, the Triune God of Israel and Jesus as the foundation of the Christian faith.

Consequently, this postfoundationalist approach to theology makes way for a charitable, modest, contrapuntal approach to other religions and their interpretive frameworks. This does not mean that the church will consider their interpretive frameworks as authoritative, inspired, and equal to Scripture. But the dialogue with other religions would become one of the elements enhancing both their faith and their doctrine of God, corroborating the biblical witness, reorienting the text within a Christocentric context, spirituality, constructing civil, social and medical ethics, and maintaining social harmony. This is possible because God himself has provided all men with the ability to attain some idea of the Godhead. Romans 1:19-20 says, "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world…" Further, Vanhoozer invokes both Calvin and Charles Hodge to argue that a human being is capable of formulating the idea of God. The idea of God 'lies in the mind' of a human being, *sensus divinitatis*.[1033] Similarly, Timothy Tennent emphasizes John Calvin's observation that, "God himself "has endued all men with some idea of his Godhead, the memory of which he constantly renews and occasionally enlarges.""[1034] The influence of this knowledge of God has an effect on other aspects of human life, and God continues to enlarge this knowledge.

Further, the WCF, while describing the nature of Apocrypha, does have something to say about how to treat non-canonical scripture. The Westminster

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[1032] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 293.

[1033] Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 25.

[1034] Based on John Calvin's "Institutes of Christian Religions" Book 1, Chapter 3.1 Timothy C. Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable: Evangelicalism in Conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), Interreligious dialogue: An Evangelical perspective, eBook format.

Confession of Faith (1.III) says, "The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of the Scripture; and therefore are of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings." It says that the Apocrypha (another religious text) is no greater than an ordinary book. It does not say that they are inappropriate books or that there is no good in them in consulting for theological dialogue and enforcing Theodrama. The confession warns, however, that any other religious texts (Apocrypha) are not inspired books, which does not mean that they are of no value as a source for wisdom, instruction, edification, and enrichment. Nor does it mean that they cannot be used as human books in religious dialogue and for enforcing social, civil and moral enrichment.

Other religious interpretive frameworks (sacred scriptures) may be used for theological dialogue and to enforce theodrama. Although the following books are lost and not canonical now but the fact is that these books were used to enforce Theodrama. For example, Joshua 10:12-13 and 2 Samuel 1:17-27 quote from the "Book of Jashar", Paul used local poets to support his argument towards the unknown God in Acts 17:16-34. Paul quotes from the poet Menander in 1 Corinthians 15:33, and from the poet Epimenides in Titus 1:12. Jude quotes from 1 Enoch in Jude 14-15[1035] to enforce Theodramatic covenant. Furthermore, Vanhoozer exemplifies this by pointing towards the use of *logos*, coming from Greek heritage, to present Jesus Christ as the Word of God. Vanhoozer's argument is affirmed by Bediako who presents yet another persuasive example in his articulation of the doctrine of "Jesus as Supreme ancestor" which integrated ATR and Scripture in theological development in the Akan context.

5.3.2.3. The concomitance of the authority of the Bible and the interpretive community

The Reformed tradition in India has always cherished the role of the Classical Reformed Church tradition who has handed over its Reformed theological heritage to them. As stated earlier, the Reformed and Presbyterian church of India (RPCI) is aligned to the classical Reformed tradition endorsed by the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA). Some of their leading theological proponents are the old Princetonian theologians like Warfield and Hodge, with whom Vanhoozer has interacted in his theological reformulation. Theological discussions pertaining to the role of the church and the authority of Scripture accentuate *Sola Scriptura.* Although Sola Scriptura is one of the defining theological positions, it is also often misunderstood. Sola Scriptura is often understood as *Solo Scriptura* in conjunction with the *Nulla tradition*, Scripture only, without church tradition. Vanhoozer proposes the postconservative approach which argues for the significant function and position of the church as the interpretive community. The Scripture has no future without the interpretive community. Without creating meaning in Scripture, the interpretive community assists in understanding the meaning of Scripture. Simply put, they are equally

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[1035] Timothy C. Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church Is Influencing the Way We Think About And Discuss Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 2007), Noncanonical "Jesus Material" used in the canonical texts, eBook format.

necessary, but not equally authoritative. Vanhoozer illustrates this relationship with an example of how the moon (interpretive community) derives its authoritative power from the sun (Scripture: communication action of God). Such is how the concomitance between Scripture and the church in the Reformed tradition in India should be perceived. This ecclesial triangulation is between the communication action of God in Christ, the triune divine discourse, and the Word-and-Spirit led belief and practices of the church in contemporary situations.

The postconservative approach to theology entails an important function for the local interpretive community. The function of the interpretive community is to discern or appropriate the meaning of Scripture. The interpretive community does not replicate but improvises the meaning of theodrama. This is the work of transformation in the reader (interpretive community). However, the interpretive community needs to possess the intellectually, morally, and theologically interpretive virtues inculcated by Scripture. Along with technical skills, some of the interpretive virtues which the interpretive community ought to possess are honesty, carefulness, humility, faith, hope, love, perception of a comprehensive meaning of the theodrama, and theological perspectives. These, among others, are all part of its fitting performance of the theodrama in contemporary situations within its broader context. These interpretive virtues will also confront the power abuse of the interpretive community which Sugirtharajah has painstakingly pointed out, as discussed in the fourth chapter.

The function of the interpretive community is to understand and fittingly appropriate the meaning of Scripture. This function of the interpretive community should be achieved in different levels. The function of the interpretive community in the first level is creedal theology, which has given seven ecumenical creeds. Creedal theology directs and relates the local church to the catholic church through ecumenical creeds proposed by the seven ecumenical councils. This entails the Reformed church in India being obliged to know, interact and align with creedal theology. The second level is the confessional level. The confessions are based in a historical ecclesial background with specific theological issues. This confessional theology mediates between the local and the catholic theology. Moreover, confessional theology assists in appropriating theodrama within a cultural and regional context. Asian, African, Latin American, European and North American theologies are best seen at a confessional level. Multi-perspectival or diverse confessional theologies are not seen as a bane but a boon for comprehending the richness of theodrama. The Reformed tradition in India can participate in a theologically enriching dialogue with other confessional theologies. However, the church has to watch out for the danger of theological relativity, as discussed by Vanhoozer.

Apart from theological enrichment, it has social repercussions as well. A positive approach to theological plentitude may also check the arrogance of any one denominational claim to be the true and authentic representation of a true church. Furthermore, it will assist the Reformed tradition in India to participate and fellowship with other confessional theologies for spiritual, ethical and social enhancement. Accepting diverse confessional theologies will also provide platforms for all the Church traditions to stay united in responding to persecution, responding to the legal matters brought against their common faith, fighting

against health scourges and giving a concerted approach in demonstrating the love of God to the people of other faiths. Dialogue on a diverse confessional level may allow churches to complement each other regardless of confessional distinctives, being cemented together with the help of creedal theology. Dialogue within a confessional level can also bring churches together to address social issues and mission work.

The third level is the congregational level which addresses the everyday concerns of the local church. It is the last stage of contextualization. At the local level the contextual setting changes. The local church looks to and interacts with the creedal and confessional theology. It, however, requires a lot of hard work from the local pastors and theologians by constantly educating and reminding the local church about their relation with the creedal and confessional levels. With the constant interaction between creedal, confessional and congregational levels, theodrama will be improvised in the local context and the authority of Scripture will be guarded from syncretism. Furthermore, a genuine dialogue between creedal, confessional and congregational levels, as equal parties, will also confront the misuse and abuse of the authority of Scripture during the development of church doctrine. However, this approach espoused by Vanhoozer should be cautiously followed because there can be a danger of theological and missional hierarchy and patriarchy, a temptation towards the monopoly of a powerful church at confessional level to impose their theological agenda onto the local church without ever actually engaging them.

5.3.2.4 Practical wisdom to improvise Reformed theology while maintaining Scriptural fidelity

There is no "one size fits all," or absolute universal algorithm to creatively perform theodrama. Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology argues for bound fidelity to Scripture and creative freedom to perform the Gospel. However, creative freedom does not mean correlation with any social or religious agendas which compromise the theodrama and the theodramatic discourse. Chapter two has highlighted various patterns of theology which have dishonored theodrama and the theodramatic discourse. Practical wisdom is a Spirit-cultivated wisdom and is inculcated by Scripture. Consequently, practical wisdom leads theological judgment to live out the knowledge of God. The following sections are three significant aspects of practical wisdom which will guide the Reformed Church in India to improvise Reformed theology while maintaining the authority of Scripture.

The first element of practical wisdom is to perform the Gospel in terms and language of the everyday ordinary life: a prosaic approach to theology. It is a theology which moves from the everyday language (genres/forms of the content) of the Scriptures to the everyday language, extrabiblical technical terms, and imaginative metaphors of the contemporary world in order to perform the Gospel. This is not adding to the content of Scripture, but rather rendering 'what is implicit explicit'. This prosaic approach will curb cultural relativism, colonialism, and absolutism in contextualization. Further, this approach would also focus on

the use of both prosaic and propositions, precepts and principles extracted from the Bible for doctrinal development. Bediako, in chapter three, has stated several examples. One such example is the significant role of ancestors in the Bible and the Akan context, and how Jesus takes the place of Supreme Ancestor par excellence.

Another example is of a relevant, theologically informed use of a prosaic word for the incarnation of Christ in a Hindu religious context. The meaning of incarnation is to take the form of the human flesh, *in carne*. The correct translation of incarnation in the Hindi language, or rather a lingual replica for it is *Deh dhari*. Yet the Hindu religious word *Avatar* will appeal to the Hindu people more because of its religious connotation. *Avatar* is the Hindu religious terminology for the different manifestations of the Hindu god, *Vishnu*, into this world to eliminate sinners and sustain the world. Of course, this word would have to be sanctified and redefined during improvisation.[1036] This has already been done with this word in a very different context. James Cameron redefined "Avatar" in his movie *Avatar.* The fact of the matter is, to translate Reformed theology for the Indian context, it is significant to recognize the value of local idioms, concepts, and everyday language. Bediako and Sugirtharajah have affirmed Vanhoozer in arguing for the use of local metaphors, and have exemplified it through developing contextual theology amidst religious pluralism and dominant power structures. Contextualization does not mean the application of already completed theology but discovering the meaning which acts fittingly in the Indian situation, shaped by Scripture and assisted by church tradition. Canonical and catholic principles (church tradition) should guide the local church to use everyday language in developing contextual theology. Vanhoozer has provided a remarkable example of the use of everyday language in the development of the doctrine of the Trinity. Also, Vanhoozer has provided a noteworthy illustration by employing the term "Drama," which embraces and integrates challenges posed by modernity (theory, reason) and postmodernity (lingual, narrative, pragmatic turns) into one metaphor "drama" and presents the redemption of Christ as Theodrama, and Scripture as Theodramatic discourse.

The second aspect of practical wisdom is theological judgment in improvising the theodrama. Theological judgment has to be more than mere theoretical knowledge or technical skills. Theological judgment is inculcated and nurtured by Scripture, powered by the Holy Spirit, soaked in interpretive virtues and theodramatic formation. Theological judgment assists in the improvisation of theodrama. Improvisation should not be confused with replication (repetition of Scripture) or innovation (departure from Scripture). Although improvisation

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[1036] Martien E. Brinkman, *The Non-Western Jesus: Jesus as Bodhisattva, Avatara, Guru, Prophet, Ancestor or Healer?*, trans. Henry and Lucy Jansen (London, New York: Routledge, 2014); Bediako, ""How Is Jesus Christ Lord?"; R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Jesus in Asia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018); R. S. Sugirtharajah, "Jesus Research and Third World Christologies," *Theology* 93, no. 755 (September 1, 1990): 387–91, https://doi.org/10.1177/0040571X9009300507; Raja Rammohun Roy and Joshua Marshman, *The Precepts of Jesus: The Guide to Peace and Happiness, Extracted from the Books of the New Testament Ascribed to the Four Evangelists. To Which Are Added, the First, Second, and Final Appeal to the Christian Public in Reply to the Observations of Dr. Marshman, of Serampore.* (London: The Unitarian Society, 1824).

entails spontaneity and fittingness, it is scripted, formed, trained and discerned in theodrama. Another word for improvisation could be disciplined contextualization or critical contextualization. Vanhoozer's argument for theological judgment is aptly demonstrated in Bediako's doctrine of Jesus as the Supreme ancestor, which is analyzed in the third chapter. However, the church has to set a boundary for discontinuity as well. Vanhoozer refers to an example of contextualization which is discontinuous with both Scripture and theodrama. He considers Mel Gibson's movie, 'The Passion of the *Christ'* an example of bad improvisation and imagination. It is an attempt to present the passion of Christ to the contemporary world, and so in this, it is a clear example of an attempt towards improvisation. However, it details events which are not part of Scripture. It focuses so much on pictorial imagination, and the prolonged glorification of scourging pain and violence, that it simply appeals for the viewers' pity on Jesus Christ. 'The Passion of the Christ' was a bad example of imagination and improvisation because the movie diverted from the redemption offered by Christ. The main purpose behind the passion was Jesus Christ taking upon himself the sins of the world. Improvising theodrama may be done with the assistance of contemporary words, phrases, and metaphors as long as the method does not invent and compromise the content of the theodrama, and does not advocate religious pluralism. For example, even the incomplete but biblical identity of Jesus in India as sage, a way, a guru, a *satyagrahi*, an *avatar*, a servant, and a compassionate friend can be presented to build bridges to communicate. However, attempts should be made to not to divert from theodrama but use these images to further lead them to see Jesus as a redeemer.

The third aspect of practical wisdom is to practice a prophetic approach to theology. Practicing the prophetic, in sync with the ministries of the Old Testament prophets, involves both reminders and confrontation whenever the church diverts from theodrama. It continuously tests the performance of the Gospel by Scripture. The prophetic approach to theology confronts us with the reality of Christ, and reminds us of the importance of keeping, remembering, obeying, and witnessing in the Theodrama.

The practical wisdom of prophetic theology should confront the Reformed church in India in many ways. First, prophetic theology will confront and correct Reformed theology if the improvisation or performance of the Gospel is not led by theodrama but by the contemporary situation, no matter how compelling it may be. For example, considering the image of Jesus as Avatar, though it may be compelling yet if it is not redefined, the redemptive message will be compromised. Second, prophetic wisdom will constantly remind the Reformed church in India that contemporary culture is valuable. Just as God used contemporary culture for His communication as He formed the nation of Israel, He also corrected them through the prophets. Hence, it will protest the church's capitulation of the Gospel to intellectual, cultural, social, and political powers. Third, prophetic wisdom will remind the Reformed tradition in India, by being witnesses to the resurrection of Christ, to participate in his resurrection here and now, in the present contemporary world. Fourth, while improvising the theodrama, prophetic theology warns against syncretism which compromises the content of Theodrama: Jesus Christ.

5.4 Conclusion

The dissertation concludes that Vanhoozer holds a Reformed approach to theology which is relevant to the Reformed tradition in India as it lives amidst religious pluralism and hidden power structures. Several hermeneutical theology elements propounded by Vanhoozer have been tested and duly affirmed by Bediako and Sugirtharajah in the third and fourth chapters. Vanhoozer successfully reframes the doctrine of Scripture expanding on the Reformed vision. Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology takes canon as the supreme rule for Christian faith, life and understanding, where the Spirit speaks in Scripture about what God has been doing in history. His hermeneutical approach is organic in nature. It is flexible, which does not bind or restrict a theologian to one hermeneutical rule for every context but focuses on theodramatic improvisation. Vanhoozer reforms Reformed theology by insisting that theology is more than mere propositions. He recognizes the contextual location (literary genre) of the human authors of the Bible, believing in the Bible as authoritative and the canon as a fiduciary interpretive framework. He also emphasizes the concomitance of the magisterial authority of Scripture and the ministerial service of the Ecclesia. Vanhoozer emphasizes cultural principles where a theologian can employ indigenous material for theodramatic improvisation (contextualization) through theological judgment and relating everyday cultural situations to the prosaic nature of the Bible. The research concludes that Vanhoozerian hermeneutical theology is relevant in burial practices in a multi religious context. Furthermore, the research recommends Vanhoozerian hermeneutical theology as relevant in matters related to burial practices because his approach is not a fixed detailed method but organic in nature. It promotes the use of metaphors, religious conceptual tools, and creativity in burial practices for social harmony, as long as the meaning of death, judgment, Christ's victory over death, and life after death as presented in the Bible are not compromised.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

This dissertation started with the observation that churches in the non-western world, are insufficiently able to respond to the challenges that arise for Christians in their multi-religious and postcolonial context. This dissertation has focused on the Reformed churches in India who live in a deeply multi-religious, though predominantly Hindu, context. One impetus for this study lay in the deep awkwardness surrounding the common Christian approach to handling Hindu-funeral rites. Despite this, the researcher's hypothesis was that, despite this deficit, Reformed theology is capable of addressing these contextual issues in India without compromising its distinctive emphasis on the authority of Scripture.

The concrete implementation of this hypothesis involved a study of Kevin Vanhoozer's Theological Hermeneutics. The dissertation concluded that Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology stays faithful to the Reformed teaching of Scripture and at the same time is able to do justice to the contextual demands of the multi-religious and postcolonial context in India. Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology has been constructed engaging deeply with the hermeneutical challenges of the premodern, modern and postmodern contexts. The research observed that Vanhoozer has incorporated four theological disciplines in his hermeneutical theology: contextual theology, systematic theology, theology of religions, and hermeneutics. These theological disciplines offer a viable route for addressing the contextual issues in theology but have fallen short in maintaining the Reformed doctrine of Scripture to the requirements of the multi religious and postcolonial Indian context.

Vanhoozer provides an answer to the Reformed churches in India by defining theological hermeneutics as the discernment of the Triune God's communicative action in the Bible. He proposes the metaphor of 'drama' as a way of relating the different aspects of his hermeneutical theology and allowing the church to clearly see the 'speech-act' of God's redemption in human history. He approaches the gospel as drama, the canon as script, doctrine as direction, the Holy Spirit as the main director, church ministers as assistant directors, and theologians as dramatists. The continuation of this drama in new contexts requires disciplined improvisation by church. Vanhoozer does not focus on Scripture simply as the supernatural work of God, distinct from the genuine contribution of the human authors, as traditional theologies do. He emphasizes the prominent role of the human authors as guided by the Triune God and the function of literary genres. He applies this hermeneutic theology using a canonical-linguistic approach, which can be summarised in six aspects. This approach is post-propositionalist because the canon encompasses more than propositions or a set of divine thoughts. It is postconservative because of its emphasis on revelation as a 'salvation-historical speech-act' rather than mere information transmission. In addition, it is postfoundationalist, in that it holds neither truths nor community faith as indubitable and incorrigible foundations, and honours the precociousness and fallibility of human reason. It is prosaic, because of its attention to literary forms and forms of life and the formative plot they entail. It is phronetic, because

of its awareness that Scripture evokes an ability to make sound judgements in specific contexts. And finally, it is prophetic because it confronts the church when it deviates from theodrama. Vanhoozer's emphases do not craft a departure from the Reformed tradition but enrich it in view of a postmodern context.

Comparing Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology with Bediako's African hermeneutics, Vanhoozer's approach proves fruitful in a multi-religious context. Bediako's hermeneutics approaches the cultural, social and religious categories of the Bible and the African context as one in the Akan narrative. For him, Scripture sheds new light on African culture and tradition; the latter are thus not just evaluated and criticised by Scripture. Bediako, for instance, presents Jesus as the ancestor par excellence where his incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension establish him undoubtedly, in African terms, as the 'supreme ancestor.' What Bediako does can be understood from Vanhoozer's categories of 'speech-act' and 'improvisation'. He uses local metaphors and emphasizes the possibility of gospel continuity with existing religious elements. Unlike Vanhoozer, Bediako grants the African church its own autonomy and seeks an Africanisation of the Christian experience. In contrast, Vanhoozer is set on Christianising the local religious experience. That said, Bediako's theology confirms that Vanhoozer's hermeneutics are relevant and fruitful within a multi-religious context.

Compared to Bediako, there is a much stronger contrast between Vanhoozer's theology and the second theologian he is contrasted with and compared to in this dissertation. Vanhoozer and Sugirtharajah's thinking differs significantly in several respects. Sugirtharajah places Jesus on a par with other religious pioneers, rejecting exclusive claims to salvation through Christ alone. He also has no theological, Trinitarian hermeneutics, nor emphasis on the authority of scripture or the church. He regards these as colonial instruments.

Yet despite these significant differences, there remain points of similarity between Sugirtharajah and Vanhoozer; they have some emphases that run parallel to each other. As a postcolonial Indian theologian, Sugirtharajah considers it necessary to modify a traditional theology of the authority of scripture in order to expose colonial power structures. While Vanhoozer's agenda is different and he maintains a strong theology of the authority of scripture, he nevertheless also offers a critique of what Sugirtharajah calls colonial power structures. According to Vanhoozer, Western theology is contextually and culturally limited and needs to develop an eye for the narrative dimension of Scripture. A hermeneutics that operates simply from propositions derived from the Bible does not do justice to the Bible. Theology not only informs but also transforms. According to Vanhoozer, Western theology is inconsistent by remaining blind to syncretism in its own context while massively criticising syncretism in non-Western contexts. Moreover, like Sugirtharajah, Vanhoozer shows openness to conceptual parallels between biblical texts and elements from local cultures, thus countering a looming divide and threatening power mechanisms. So, despite differences in principle between these two theologians, this key similarity makes it clear that Vanhoozer's hermeneutical strategies have the potential to illuminate and break down power structures in a multi-faith context.

When we then focus this conversation between Vanhoozer and the two other theologians mentioned above on the practical occasion with which this research commenced, the potentiality of Vanhoozer's Theological hermeneutics appears to be confirmed. Vanhoozer's hermeneutics can further help Reformed Christians in the Indian context in dealing with existing funeral rites. Vanhoozer's hermeneutics leaves room for responding to secularised funeral rites in the Western context as long as this does not compromise the meaning of central biblical notions regarding death, judgement, Christ's victory over death and life after death. Under this condition, Bediako also allows rituals in a multi-religious context that celebrate the life lived and honour the death of the loved one. Extravagant rituals are also conceivable, provided they do not overshadow the gospel. Sugirtharajah and Vanhoozer also have overlap on this point, specifically when it comes to the comfort that certain cultural customs can offer bereaved families. Yet, while Sugirtharajah is willing to use sacred texts, prayers and customs from different religions, Vanhoozer sees Jesus as the exclusive source of all consolation. Vanhoozer's hermeneutic theology proves relevant to challenges related to funeral practices in a multi-religious context because his approach does not lay down a detailed methodology. Within the framework of ongoing content-qualified theodrama, there is room for metaphors, originally religiously coloured conceptual tools and creativity in the service of social harmony between Christians and others.

Based on the potentiality of Vanhoozer's hermeneutical theology for funeral rites, the research implemented and proposed three different ways of executing funeral rites in a Christian- Hindu context. The first context is where the deceased and the society is predominantly Hindu but the son is a Christian who has no option but to perform the rituals. The research improvised major funeral rites by redefining them as socio-cultural and Christian. The second context is where the deceased is a Hindu but the son is Christian and the society is both Hindu and Christian. In this context, Hindu funeral rites are kept to a minimum, yet still offering some influence through improvisation. The third context is where the deceased, family and the society are all Christians. The research proposed that the Church use neutral and yet Hindu culturally sensitive funeral rites. The purpose of these proposals is to address the Western and religious power structure in funeral rites, bring harmony among the Christian-Hindu context and provide a platform to share the love of God to all who are mourning and grieving the loss of their dear one.

If Vanhoozer's theological hermeneutics intends to remain within the framework of the Reformed tradition and at the same time, in an interaction with two non-Western theologians, proves fruitful in addressing a practical problem within a multi-religious context, one decisive question remains. Can this hermeneutic be seen in accordance with the Reformed tradition, as it has been applied within the Indian church group on which the research was primarily focused, where the Westminster Confession of faith is held as a confession? Vanhoozer reformulated scriptural authority by paying more attention to its organic character in which the Holy Spirit engages people. The Bible does not constitute a supernatural book separate from reality, nor an additional divine actor alongside the Trinitarian God himself. With this emphasis often comes a better understanding of its content and more adequate judgments in diverse contexts.

The sufficiency of Scripture emerges in a new way. The Bible tells the true story of the world and chronicles the story of how the world itself also shares in God's works. The above six aspects of Vanhoozer's canonical-linguistic approach prove relevant to the view of Scripture among Indian Reformed people. The Bible not only informs Christians about Christ but forms them into competent witnesses of Christ. It makes room for a loving, humble and contrapuntal approach to other religions and their interpretive frameworks. It enhances our ability to apply the Bible to contemporary realities. At the same time, it affirms the biblical witness within a more Christocentric framework. It brings into focus the role of the interpretive community and guides its formation in interpretive virtues without compromising the magisterial authority of Scripture. It helps in the improvisation of theodrama, by pointing out a third way of feeding through Scripture rather than needing to choose between the mere repetition of Scripture or deviation from Scripture. It limits the risks of cultural relativism, colonialism and absolutism in improvisation. And finally, it protests against the looming risks of syncretism and capitulation to existing intellectual, cultural, social and political powers.

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