

**A BIBLICAL SPIRITUALITY FOR EVANGELICAL AND CHARISMATIC
CHURCHES IN 21ST CENTURY SOUTH AFRICA**

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**A BIBLICAL SPIRITUALITY FOR EVANGELICAL AND CHARISMATIC
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By

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF THEOLOGY

In the subject

CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

At the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: PROF LOUISE KRETZSCHMAR

December 2010

Declaration

I declare that “A Biblical Spirituality for Evangelical and Charismatic Churches in 21st Century South Africa” is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Pietermaritzburg, October 2010

Craig Frederick Botha.

Abstract

The Scriptures, as found in the Old and New Testaments, are foundational to a genuine Christian spirituality. Among the different existing approaches to spirituality, the evangelical and charismatic churches in South Africa today need to rediscover a distinctive biblical approach to spirituality for themselves in order to facilitate the discipleship of their own members. A holistic biblical spirituality can also serve society in practical ways and challenge the perceptions and practices of a South African society which is seeking to advance without religious foundations.

Key Words

Biblical spirituality, evangelical, charismatic, holistic spirituality, Christian spirituality in 21st South Africa, Kingdom of God.

Acknowledgements

This Masters degree occupied me for a long time as I am the leader of a diverse, multicultural church in Pietermaritzburg. I therefore firstly want to express my profound gratitude to my lovely wife Shannon, who sacrificed time together to enable me to study. Secondly, I would like to thank my skilled administrator, Louise Schmidt, for her tireless help in the ministry. And Grace Generation Church, the great church I am privileged to be a part of, for their love, prayer, and financial support, and for providing many of the lessons learnt and discussed in this dissertation. Thirdly, I want to thank Prof Kretzschmar for her patience, support, insightful comments and friendship during this academic journey, as well as Rhonda Crouse who helped to edit the dissertation. Finally, I want to thank the Lord who sustained me during

frustrating periods, and encouraged me with fresh insight into the Scriptures and his unfolding purposes for our great but troubled nation.

Pietermaritzburg, October 2010

Craig Frederick Botha.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter one: The importance of a biblical spirituality	8
1.1 What is Christian spirituality?	8
1.2 Modernism and postmodern spiritualities	10
1.3 What is a biblical spirituality?	12
1.3.1 An encounter with God	12
1.3.2 Loving God and my neighbour	15
1.3.3 The Scriptures are foundational	17
1.4 A biblical spirituality draws on earlier traditions	18
1.5 My background: 1978 – 2007	19
1.7 Outline of Chapters	29
Chapter two: Who are the evangelicals and charismatics?	31
2.1 Evangelicals and the growth of evangelicalism	31
2.2 The history of evangelicals	33
2.2.1 The magisterial reformation	34
2.2.2 The Puritans	34
2.2.3 Pietism	35
2.2.4 The Great Awakening	35
2.2.5 Reaction to the social gospel	36
2.3 Evangelicalism in South Africa	38
2.4 Charismatics	41
2.4.1 The history of the Charismatic Movement	41
2.5 Evangelicals in South Africa	46
Chapter three: Methodological approach	49
3.1 Christian spirituality and theology	50
3.2 Christian spirituality and the Bible	54
3.2.1 Contemporary evangelicals and charismatics and biblical spirituality	58
3.3 A critical reflection on experience	59
Chapter four: The spirituality of the New Testament church	62
4.1 The context in Israel and the Roman Empire 4 BC – 64 AD	63
4.2 The authorship, date and content of the book of Acts	65
4.3 Early New Testament spirituality: Characteristics	69
4.3.1 An understanding of the Kingdom of God	69

4.3.2	Christ's new ethical standards	70
4.3.3	A new community of the Spirit	72
4.3.4	The foundational role of Scripture	72
4.4	Acts 6: Problems, solutions and expansion	73
4.5	Acts 6:1–7	74
4.5.1	Grecian Jews	74
4.5.2	The Hebraic Jews	75
4.6	Practical challenges	77
4.6.1	The challenge of poverty	77
4.6.2	The challenge of culture	79
4.6.3	The challenge of leadership	84
4.6.3.1	Authentic Christian authority and decision making	86
4.6.3.2	Credible leadership	86
4.6.3.3	The seven were appointed with prayer	87
4.7	Summary	88
Chapter five: Implications of a biblical spirituality for the evangelical and charismatic church in South Africa today in the areas of poverty, culture and leadership		90
5.1	African challenges	90
5.1.1	Poverty	92
5.1.2	Culture	93
5.1.3	Leadership	94
5.2	South African social challenges	94
5.3	Living out a biblical spirituality	96
5.3.1	Contributing to the reduction of poverty	96
5.3.1.1	Perceptions of need, a practical response and lessons learnt in the area of poverty	96
5.3.2	Addressing the challenge of culture	98
5.3.2.1	Perceptions of need, a practical response and lessons learnt in the area of culture	100
5.3.3.	Facilitating the development of servant leaders for the church and society	102
5.3.3.1	Perceptions of need, a practical response and lessons learnt in the area of leadership	104
5.4	Summary	108

Chapter six: Towards a recovery of a biblical spirituality by evangelical and charismatic churches in South Africa	111
6.1 An ongoing encounter with God through an experience of the living Christ and understanding the centrality of his gospel of Grace	113
6.2 Understanding and demonstrating the Kingdom of God through the church as a new community that extends love for its neighbour	115
6.2.1 The Kingdom of God and the ministry of Jesus	116
6.2.2 The Kingdom of God and the church as a new community	117
6.2.3 The Kingdom of God, South African churches and love for neighbour	119
6.3 The work of the Spirit and a new standard of ethical behaviour	121
6.3.1 The work of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament church	121
6.3.2 The work of the Spirit in the Evangelical Revival	121
6.3.3 The work of the Spirit in South African churches and a new standard of ethical behaviour	122
6.4 A return to the Bible as a major source of evangelical spirituality	123
6.4.1 The importance of the Bible for evangelicals	123
6.4.2 The need for evangelicals to rediscover the Bible	124
6.4.3 The need to rediscover the Bible in South Africa	125
6.4.4 The interpretation and application of Scripture	127
6.4.5 Conclusion	128
Chapter seven: Conclusion	130
Bibliography	137

Chapter one: The importance of a biblical spirituality

The aim of this dissertation is to investigate how a holistic, biblical spirituality can enable the evangelical and charismatic church to grapple with the challenges of 21st century South Africa, and to clarify how the Scriptures ought to inform and direct the ethical behaviour of Christians today. This dissertation will argue for a spirituality rooted in the Old and New Testament Scriptures, which are able to shape the type of people the church and society desperately need.

Christian spirituality involves an encounter with God, which produces new life through Christ, the Living Word, and through interacting with the Scriptures, God's written Word. Disciples of Christ receive this new life through the empowering of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:12–16; 2 Corinthians 1:21).¹ This new life is the essence of Christian spirituality, and involves both personal and societal transformation (Luke 24:44–49). In my view, only a deep spirituality arising out of a personal encounter with God will bring real change to the church and society today. The deeper our encounter with God, the greater our impact on society.

1.1 What is Christian spirituality?

Although the noun “spirituality” is not used in the Bible, Paul defines true spirituality in 1 Corinthians 2:13–16, describing specifically the life of the Christian who is indwelt and lives by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:14). It is a life of grace which begins with God the Father, who draws us to himself. He makes this relationship possible through the death of his Son and the power of the Spirit.

Christian spirituality is not a technique to be mastered or a means of gaining merit; it is a response to God's love. “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). The life of the Spirit in turn will elevate us to a higher level of righteousness than ritual obedience under Old Testament law (Romans 8:1–17). Gordon Fee (1994:899), in his discussion of the Holy Spirit in the letters of Paul, notes: “The Spirit is the key to all truly Christian spirituality.” Jesus said in John 4:24: “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

¹In this dissertation, the English Standard Version (ESV) is used unless otherwise stated.

Fee comments that the failure to recognise the central role of spirituality in Paul's writings stems partially from the inadequate English translation of the word "spiritual":

The evidence is overwhelming that Paul, quite in keeping with first-century usage, never intended *pneumatikos* to refer either to the human spirit or to some vague idea like "spiritual" which in English serves as an adjective meaning "religious", "nonmaterial", "spooky", "nonsecular", or "godly". In every instance in Paul its primary reference is the Holy Spirit, even when contrasted with "material blessings" in 1 Corinthians 9:11. (Fee 1996: xi)

In Romans 1:11, Paul longs to impart "some spiritual gift" – a gift of the Spirit; and the 'spiritual blessings' of Ephesians 1:3 are blessings that come from life in the Spirit.

The term "spirituality" therefore refers not simply to the academic study, but to the lived experience of God. The study of spirituality entails not only acquiring knowledge, but also learning how to use that knowledge in your spiritual life and in fostering the spiritual life of others. Christian spirituality is lived out in the context of a community, working out the implications of the Christian faith in the world. Spirituality involves the "outworking in real life of a person's religious faith – what a person does with what they believe" (McGrath 1999:2). In earlier centuries spirituality was called devotion or piety. According to Hanson (1990:3): "Spirituality is thus a faith's wisdom for living that faith."

Christian spirituality is a lived experience, the starting point being the Spirit of Christ living in a person. Christian spirituality explores the life of communion with God. Paul writes: "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25). Spirituality rooted in Scripture and nourished by prayer sustains the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ. "Until Christ is formed in you" is the watchword of Christian spiritual formation (Galatians 4:19). It entails the living of the Christian life in dependence on the Holy Spirit. Such an integrated and holistic spirituality results in a change of behaviour, flowing out of an internal change of values through an experience of God's grace. Such an integration of being and doing leads to personal and societal transformation. True Christian spirituality is holistic and biblical. Because there are many privatized versions of Christianity and Christian spirituality, some authors speak of an integrated or holistic spirituality.

The Christian church has, since its beginnings, grappled with what exactly it means to be a Christian, i.e. the relationship between God, self and the world, including your

community, society and the physical world. The resurgence of interest in spirituality over the past forty years has led to the quest for a clearer definition of Christian spirituality. A particular interest in Christian spirituality has arisen in both Catholic and Protestant circles globally, as churches have felt the need for renewal and have shifted from a modern to a postmodern cultural context, with a growing reaction to individualism, materialism, rationalism and quietism. The term spirituality itself, which, “only twenty years ago connoted suspect enthusiasm or mindless piety in Protestant circles and was virtually unknown to Judaism, Eastern traditions, Native American religion, the new religious movements, or secular systems of life integration is now used freely within all of these circles” (Schneiders 1989:30).

Many would see this search taking place alongside an institutional church in crisis. While today’s Christians have won more people to Christ than in all other ages combined, clearly there has also arisen a clear awareness that spiritual depth, and church communities reflecting this depth, have been sorely lacking. We know about God intellectually, but hardly know him at all. Sheldrake states: “Paradoxically this trend occurs while a widespread decline in traditional religious practice in the West runs parallel with an ever-increasing hunger for spirituality” (1998:5).

There has been a massive resurgence in Christian and other forms of spirituality in the last few decades. “This ‘turn to spirituality’ has been manifested across the major groups of Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant Christians as well as within theological groupings such as Charismatic, Evangelical and Liberation theologies” (Kretzschmar 2007:334).

Some of the significant writers that will be used as sources in this dissertation include: Foster (1978, 1999), McGrath (1987, 1995, 1999), Peterson (1992, 1997), Schneiders (1986, 1989), Sheldrake (1998) and Willard (1998, 2002). Other important sources include the three-volume *Christian spirituality* published by SCM Press (McGinn, Meyendorff and Leclercq 1985, Raitt 1988, Dupre and Saliers 1989). Other sources used will be cited where referenced in the discussion.

1.2 Modernism and postmodern spiritualities

Contemporary spirituality has attempted to position itself as non-dualistic, impacting the whole of life, rather than propagating a narrow view of spirituality as a “radical

world-denying, anti-materialistic, ascetic philosophy of life” (Kourie 2000:12). This has occurred as society enters a more pluralistic, multicultural, postmodern epoch with a growing array of religions and spiritualities. “We are now undergoing an even more profound change than in the sixties, though it is less noisy, with the emergence of mass ‘spirituality’ at the end of the 20th century” (Willard 2002:98). The publication of M. Scott Peck, a spiritually-minded psychotherapist’s *The road less traveled* in 1978 is an example of the development of new forms of spirituality. Such diverse spiritualities have arisen as an expression of the “absolute need for a spiritual life” (Van Ness 1996:2).

Modernism began during the Enlightenment, a European intellectual movement of the 17th and 18th centuries. For modernist thinkers, human reason became the measure of all things, and autonomous individual choices were emphasized rather than reliance on revelation, faith and divine authority. With the emergence of the modern scientific worldview, influenced by the philosophy of positivism (which held that only what can be measured is real), spiritual worldviews were regarded as outdated. Increasingly moral theories with no spiritual or religious base were proposed. Modernism was critical of religion, the Bible and spirituality.

In reaction to the loss of spiritual meaning wrought by modernism, postmodernism was critical of rational belief systems and religious authority. It adopted a relativistic view of morality and critiqued notions of universal truth. In postmodernism “statistics reduce beliefs to opinions and moral standards to personal preferences. Technological reproduction and ceaseless visual representation work against any concept of mystery of the sacred” (Veith 1994:206).

However, the mid-20th century saw a new openness towards spirituality, the supernatural, and the eternal. Alongside this there arose a critique of “the truth and evangelistic claims” of the Christian faith, the authority of the Bible, and a single commitment to Christ. The postmodern worldview accepted intuition and emotion as its centre, rather than rational thought and biblical truth. In this new world contradictions can be ignored as reason and absolutes are questioned. Contemporary trends such as postmodernism and multiculturalism are firmly rooted in relativism, with no transcendent source of truth or morality. “Although spirituality re-emerges as one of the myriad of possibilities in postmodernity, it is a blurred

spirituality, a spirituality which is detached from traditional notions of truth and which could just as well be occultic as having facets of Christian thinking, or often both” (Stravidis 2001:77). But, from a Christian perspective, not all spiritualities are valid or good. Some have adopted a subjective form of spirituality that has no objective base in Scripture.² The apostle John writes:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. (1 John 4:1–3)

An awareness of the development of modernism and postmodernism will enable Christians to be truly relevant to our age, as the church recovers and applies its rich spiritual heritage to the prevailing culture. While some people may still have premodern worldviews, such as many in rural Africa, the shift from modernism to postmodernism is important for this dissertation and the construction of a biblical spirituality for today. This dissertation will therefore focus on the importance of a biblical spirituality with particular reference to evangelical and charismatic churches in 21st century post-apartheid South Africa. Acts 6:1–7 will be used as the focus of the issues to be examined. Characteristics of a biblical spirituality arising from this passage will be noted, alongside the challenges of poverty, culture and leadership, the central foci of this dissertation.

1.3 What is a biblical spirituality?

There is a need to define what biblical spirituality is and the role it plays in the field of Christian spirituality and among the variety of approaches that exist. A preliminary description of three of the characteristics of a biblical spirituality are provided below. This initial description will be developed in the course of the dissertation.

1.3.1 An encounter with God

God is revealed to us in the Bible as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Early church theologians, and Christians since, have developed the doctrine of the Trinity to seek to explain this self-revelation. This one God sustains and directs our spirituality. God

²Gnosticism was one of the major heresies to seriously affect the early church. Because Gnosticism (from the Greek word *gnosis*, which means knowledge) was dualistic and saw the material created world as inferior to the spiritual world, it rejected the humanity of Christ. Many of the New Testament letters refute Gnosticism.

is one, yet each Person of the Trinity is fully God. Christian spirituality is thus uniquely Trinitarian, as we come to the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit (Mark 1:10–11; 2 Corinthians 13:14). While the doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery, it is also one of the most central and important distinguishing doctrines of the Christian faith, and of vital significance for Christian spirituality. “The doctrine of the Trinity is the cornerstone of Christian belief because it synthesizes the whole ‘economy’ of God’s relationship with creation, including humankind” (Sheldrake 1998:18). The Nicene Creed of 325 AD confirms this (Grudem 1994:1169).

According to Ware (2005:40), “Paul concludes his second letter to the Corinthians with the benediction: ‘The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all’ (2 Corinthians 13:14). He understood that the God of the Bible will bless his people as the grace of Christ, the love of the Father, and the fellowship of the Spirit are present with us.” The Trinity is best understood experientially, in a living and practical way. We experience the Father by knowing that he loves us and has proved it by sending his Son. We experience Jesus as our Saviour, who is both divine and a fellow human being, who intercedes for us before the Father. We experience the Spirit as our Comforter, the one who empowers us for witness and service. Although such an emphasis on the experience of the Holy Spirit would resonate well with more evangelical, charismatic and pentecostal sentiments, the discipline of Christian spirituality traditionally has an inherently Trinitarian leaning. Even with texts that focus on a single Person of the Trinity, the broader sense is more fully Trinitarian (Lombaard 2010).

As we look at the distinct roles of and relationships between the Persons of the Trinity, we see that, although each Person is equal and identical in essence, the Father’s role is supreme over that of the Son, for it is the Father who sends the Son, the Spirit in turn advances the work of the Son to the glory of the Father. Christ himself is both the living word of God and the one who hears, speaks and obeys the Father’s words (John 1:1–18; Philippians 2:5–11).

A biblical spirituality is Christ-centred. We encounter Christ as the Lamb of God sent by the Father into the world for the forgiveness of sins and resurrection to new life. Christ is the focus of all the Scriptures, the supreme hermeneutical principle (Isaiah 7:14; 53; Matthew 1:21–23; Luke 24:27; 1 Corinthians 15:1–4).

Early Christian spirituality grew out of Judaism with the defining event of “the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth that inaugurated and shaped Christian spirituality” (McGinn, Meyendorff and Leclercq 1985:1). The importance and centrality of the Christ event in early Christian spirituality could be seen in the proclamation of the gospel, catechesis and formation of new converts, as well as early Christian writings and theology. According to Schneiders (1985:6): “Not only was he the fullness of the Old Testament (see Acts 2:22–36) and therefore the key to its true meaning, but also he was presented as supplying during his own lifetime the example of how the Scriptures were to be interpreted.”

The transforming encounter between God and those who respond to God is brought about by the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:6–16; 2 Corinthians 3:17–18; Galatians 5:16–25). The Spirit of God is active in the creation and consummation of the world, and in the salvation of sinners. The Spirit empowers the gospel proclamation of Jesus. After responding to the gospel, regeneration to newness of life takes place by the same Spirit. Christ's death and resurrection have made the new covenant effective for the people of God, and the Holy Spirit becomes the fulfilled reality in the lives of God's people as God now dwells among his people. The Holy Spirit was instrumental in the inspiration of the Scriptures as “men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20–21). The Spirit worked in the writers of Scripture in such a way that what they wrote was both their word and God's word.

The ongoing communication process between the believer and God is part of a transformative process of spirituality that has both personal and societal dimensions. “The Christian encounter with God is transformative. As John Calvin (1509–64) pointed out, to know God is to be changed by God; true knowledge of God leads to worship, as the believer is caught up in a transforming and renewing encounter with the living God” (McGrath 1999:28).

Finally, the fact that God, though one in essence, is plural and communal in person, indicates that we should also view ourselves as relational persons in community. “Any version of Christian spirituality that is individualistic in tone fails to reflect the communion of equal relationships that is God in Trinity” (Sheldrake 1998:16).

1.3.2 Loving God and my neighbour

In the South African context, loving God and one another becomes a crucial characteristic and definition of a biblical spirituality and a restored community.

Susan Rakoczy (2006:1), a South African Catholic writer, notes:

What is our future as committed Christians as the third millennium begins? How shall we live the Christian life – how do we live the gospel now as we seek to create a new, just, peaceful world? What resources of the Spirit of God are available to us in the quest to transform our cultures and societies? Two temptations are enticing. One is to plunge into activism without a spiritual grounding. The other, especially insidious, is to take a deep breath, close the door of the churches on the problems of society, and focus on a private experience of religion. For some, a “Jesus and me” religiosity is very satisfying since it allows them to seek personal holiness without attention to those outside the religious circle. This, however, is a corruption of the gospel, whose basic principle is love of God and love of neighbour.

Loving my neighbour involves loving those who are not part of the Christian community as Jesus so powerfully demonstrated in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37). Paul echoes this principle in Galatians 6:10: “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” This means we also carry a measure of responsibility for those outside the household of faith.

There is a growing need to experience a holistic spirituality, a spirituality that is non-dualistic and impacts the totality of life, not separating reality into different spheres: the material and spiritual, the sacred and secular, salvation and social action. Dualism creates a divorce between the spiritual and material aspects of life, while individualism creates a divorce between the individual and the community. Dualism has divided the church, while true, holistic spirituality involves loving God and one another. A holistic spirituality is therefore a critique of the disengagement of the church from the social, secular realm of life. Impacting society with the gospel of Christ has often been abandoned in favour of the existential needs of the individual. A genuine Christian spirituality challenges the privatization of faith, where a relationship with God is excluded from the public sphere and compressed into a privately held, consumer-based personal choice. Such a privatization of the Christian faith prevents the content and implications of the gospel from affecting and changing the socio-historical context. This has deprived society of the cumulative impact and

moral force of the Christian church. “In this sense, privatization is virtually synonymous with quietism (sometimes termed pietism) which refers to a type of theological praxis which fails to encompass the socio-political and economic implications of the Christian faith” (Kretzschmar 1998a:21).

The Bible knows nothing about this “privatization” or “spiritualization” of the gospel of Jesus Christ. A biblical spirituality is effective and life renewing because Jesus is Lord and Creator of the universe (John 1:3; Acts 17:22–28; Colossians 1:15–20), and has built a moral framework for life into the universe. There is a definite link between the material order and the moral order, between morality and spirituality. Human beings can only be fully human and moral when we relate to God and one another. The scriptural basis for this is the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2 (see also John 1:1–4; Colossians 1:15–17). All existence is subject to God, and finds its meaning in God and the revelation he provides in Scripture. Acceptance of this biblical worldview will restore our moral character.

For Christians, who claim to live according to the moral norms and values derived from the Bible and are followers of Jesus Christ, the formation of all believers, especially leaders, is an inescapable task. It is inescapable because of passages such as the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:1–20, Deut 5:1–33), the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5–7), and the stress on moral character and behaviour in passages such as Colossians 3:1–17, 1 Timothy 3:1–13, and 2 Peter 1:3–11. (Kretzschmar 2007:7)

From a biblical point of view, cooperating with this moral and spiritual structure of reality makes an action good and right, rather than bad and wrong. To disregard this cosmic reality and moral environment is to imperil ourselves and society. Forsaking the Judeo-Christian worldview of the Bible has devastating social consequences. Instead of withdrawing from the social arena, the church has a tremendous opportunity to legitimize this biblical worldview for society by living out the implications of the gospel.

A country like South Africa, with so many professing Christians, has a great need for the cumulative impact of an effective Christian social ethic in the post-apartheid restructuring of society, i.e. to be salt and light in our communities (Matthew 5:13–16).

1.3.3 The Scriptures are foundational

The holistic spirituality of the Bible is indispensable within the field of Christian spirituality. Second Timothy 3:16 declares that “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness”. Paul stresses the divine origin and authority of Scripture as God's revelation to us. Schneiders (1985:4) discusses the central role of Scripture in early Christian spirituality: “Every word of the sacred text was pregnant with divine meaning and everything of religious significance was expressed in the context of biblical categories and by means of biblical language.” This included the proclamation of the gospel, catechesis and the formation of new converts. Theology consisted largely of exegesis of Scripture. An underlying assumption of early Christian exegesis was that biblical interpretation was both the work of demanding scholarship and faithful contemplation.

This transformative engagement with God through the Scriptures results in a biblically enriched and shaped spirituality. Schneiders (1985:6) notes: “Contrary to the assumptions of post-Renaissance exegesis, the early church assumed that the Bible, in some ways at least, was unlike any other type of literature. It was believed not only that every word of Scripture was inspired by God but also that every word was the bearer, in some way, of divine revelation.” The early church held that only the believing community could rightly interpret the biblical text. Biblical spirituality therefore involves a revelation experience as God informs and sustains our spirituality through the Bible, while our Christian experience in turn deepens our understanding of the Scriptures, thus creating a dynamic synthesis of faith and life.

Two issues are important for the purpose of this dissertation: firstly, the Bible is important for Christian spirituality, and any genuine Christian spirituality must be foundationally biblical. The biblical books found in the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts – the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments – are regarded by evangelicals and charismatics as the word of God, utterly trustworthy and reliable. However, even when Christians accept the Bible as their central text, we are faced with the issue of how the Bible has been understood, interpreted and applied by different people over the centuries as a source of Christian spirituality. This has bearing not only for evangelicals and charismatics, but for all Christians. It

has been a vital factor in the development of a more holistic, biblical spirituality. These issues will be dealt with in chapters five and six.

Biblical spirituality is, in its own right, part of theology, biblical studies and Christian spirituality. Therefore, it has a vital contribution to make to all of these disciplines. We return to this point in chapter three.

1.4 A biblical spirituality draws on earlier traditions

Evangelicals can learn from Christians from earlier periods. Houston (1996:160) notes that, throughout church history, the church's historical context has significantly influenced the changing emphases of hermeneutics and the various methods of reading the Bible:

Monastic life became one of *lectio*, reading the Scriptures and other books of devotion from two to five hours daily. This *lectio* was further defined as *divina*, "divine reading", for three reasons. Firstly, it was the text of Holy Scripture, the Word of God that was being read. Secondly, it was so by virtue of the manner in which it was read, in prayerfulness and the slow rumination of life. Thirdly, its purpose was spiritual growth and transformation of life. In this way Bible reading was indispensable for spiritual growth.

This divine reading, or what the Benedictines called "*lectio divina*", thus involved the reading of Scripture in prayerfulness and for the purpose of spiritual formation and transformation of life. It amounts to a more intuitive approach to biblical interpretation through "listening for God's voice" and being in conversation with God. This devotional reading is also a long-established method of reading the Bible in the Christian tradition and ought to be given its rightful place alongside other methods of Bible reading.

Classical Protestantism, and especially the major 16th century reformers, Luther and Calvin, were opposed to divisions between theology and spirituality, doctrine and ethics. Unlike many modern biblical critics, Luther did not make a sharp distinction between what the text meant to the author then, and the reader now. "Luther got very swiftly to the application of Scripture. He only spent a few sentences on what Paul / Judaizers were up to and quickly applied it to the Catholic Church. He very quickly read himself and his own situation into what he was reading."³

Luther's lecturing at Wittenberg University was full of application to the situation of his day, and not much different from his Church preaching. Calvin applied the Ten

³Conversation with Dr Michael Eaton, 21 July 2007.

Commandments to the state of Geneva. Calvin's Geneva and Luther's Wittenberg were as much churches as universities. According to Houston (1996:164):

The tendency of reformed faith, whether Lutheran or Calvinist, was to favour preaching as the primary vehicle for the reading of the Scriptures, to the detriment often of the home Bible reader. This led initially to a rapid reform of doctrine that did not represent a reform of life for the ordinary church-goer. The Pietists in turn saw a great need for reform to be taken further into the homes of the common people.

Thus doctrine was to be transformed from intellectual belief into everyday Christian faith and experience. Nineteenth-century biblical criticism was valuable in helping with issues such as analysis of the text, genre, authorship and matters of context. It was, however, problematic in its imposition of rationalistic and secularist assumptions on the Bible and its negative view of miracles, personal faith and the power of God to transform due to the influence of prevailing deism and atheism. These developments in turn resulted in an impoverished spirituality as the link between Scripture, personal faith and social life was downplayed. True biblical spirituality seeks to reverse this trend, without ignoring valuable information gained from critical readings including authorship, textual and cultural analysis.

What then of the 19th and 20th centuries? According to Kretzschmar (2001:290):

For much the 19th and 20th centuries, moral formation, personal devotion, liturgy and spiritual direction have seldom found their place in the formal courses taught in academic Protestant theological institutions. Although elements of these have continued to receive a greater or lesser degree of attention in Catholic universities and both Catholic and Protestant seminaries, they have not been a marked feature of the formal academic theological education of mainstream Protestant academic institutions.

This dissertation is therefore directed to a consideration of a contemporary, holistic, biblical spirituality that incorporates many of these neglected elements. As noted in chapter three, many earlier Christian traditions and insights are drawn on to identify key elements of biblical spirituality. These, together with a consideration of especially the book of the Acts of the Apostles, are vital for the renewal of evangelical and charismatic churches in South Africa today.

1.5 My background: 1978 – 2007

In addition to the lessons learnt from earlier traditions, the personal and communal transformative process I have undergone as a white pastor in the turbulent townships of the Western Cape from 1985 to 1997, and in a multicultural church in

Pietermaritzburg from 1998 to 2008, has been crucial in the formation of my understanding of a biblical spirituality. This experience has influenced my understanding of the gospel, spirituality and evangelicalism. This process of being shaped and nourished by the Scriptures while learning to obey them and being led by the Spirit of God has greatly contributed to my interest in a biblical spirituality. Critical reflection on my experience alongside the Scriptures and the insights of other writers has informed and enriched my understanding of the gospel within a changing South Africa. It has helped to avoid a narrow evangelical understanding of Christian spirituality.

I matriculated in 1977, a white South African male, largely unaffected by and unaware of the trauma experienced by black matriculants, particularly during the momentous Soweto school uprising of 1976. I spent four years and six months in the South African Navy (SAN), as an extended period of national service. I entered the SAN at age 17 and resigned at 21. This time was spent serving as a naval diver and radar operator on board a strike craft, a missile vessel patrolling the South African waters.

I met Christ during this time as part of a dramatic conversion experience, and remained an active Christian throughout my naval service. I also received the baptism in the Holy Spirit⁴ soon after conversion, which opened my life in new ways to the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Although I had become a Christian, it did not occur to me that serving in the South African Defence Force (SADF) was wrong. We believed every citizen had to obey the state (Romans 13:1–2). The Baptist Church that I attended prayed for us, but did little to conscientize us to a new, critical awareness of the situation in our country. It taught that apartheid was biblically and morally wrong, but the only response to the prevailing unjust social order was prayer.

During this time the SAN carried out a number of very damaging, destabilizing raids on our neighbouring states of Angola and Mozambique. (These actions took place in the struggle being waged against the African liberation movements during the 1970s

⁴ The baptism in the Holy Spirit is the first personal experience of the fullness of the Spirit. This experience is mentioned in Romans 8:16, Galatians 4:6 and, with the receiving of the Spirit, in Galatians 3:2. It experientially 'seals' the believers' salvation, empowers them for witness and results in boldness of speech. It does not take place automatically at their initial conversion.

and 1980s.) We destroyed harbours in Mozambique and Angola from naval strike craft, as well as strategic infrastructure involving loss of life on a number of highly organized secret missions. We worked closely with the infamous reconnaissance commandoes based in Langebaan in the Western Cape. We were told that these maritime operations were helping our country deal with African National Congress's (ANC) terrorist bases in neighbouring countries. We were aware that the Russians and Cubans were involved in southern Africa, and felt obliged to stop the spread of communism across our borders. On a number of occasions, we were visited before our missions by high-ranking Defence Force personnel, who wished us well and spoke to us about the importance of our missions, and what we were doing to protect the country from a total communist onslaught.

I was later to make a submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in post-apartheid South Africa regarding my experiences from 1979 to 1982 as a part of my own personal repentance for helping to uphold apartheid. I quote from the submission:

I remember one night, on my 20th birthday on board the ship (because we never went ashore with the commandoes) on the 11th of August 1980 being involved in a mission where we were blowing up such installations. I never spoke to anyone about these missions and basically felt that we were serving the Defence Force. I was politically naive and it was only later that I realized what a lie I had been involved in. As I look back upon this period, it is with deep shame and regret that I took part in these acts of sabotage and violent destabilization. The struggles our neighbouring states have had to undergo to date are particularly attributable to these missions.⁵

I resigned from the Navy having been called by God to train as a pastor. I attended the Hatfield Baptist Bible School in Pretoria from 1982 to 1985. The Bible school was evangelical and charismatic in its theology and experience, part of Hatfield Baptist Church. It was a formative and spiritually enriching time for both my wife and I. Although the church had a high view of Scripture and the gospel, the inadequate response of the church and leadership to the gross injustices of apartheid during the 1980s was largely due to a privatized faith, which was an escape from facing the challenges of our social reality. A basically fundamentalist biblical conservatism masked identification with the status quo. There was a tendency to confuse biblical and political conservatism and to be dualistic rather than biblical.

⁵TRC submission, 23 July 1997, <http://70.84.171.10/~etools/newsbrief/1997/news0724>, accessed 2 April 2010.

I moved from Pretoria to serve as pastor in an evangelical/ charismatic church in Cape Town which had recently left the Baptist Union. The congregation, called the Jubilee Community Church, was multicultural and multinational. In about 1985, Jubilee became part of a growing international “apostolic sphere” of churches called New Frontiers International, led by Terry Virgo, a leader with considerable apostolic gifting. It became a very meaningful partnership in which we were also recipients of much relational, doctrinal and financial help over many years. Our partnership with an international family of churches such as New Frontiers also helped us break out of ‘isolationist mentality’ from years of living under Apartheid rule.

We believed our church community was a “prophetic sign” of the coming new South Africa. The name chosen for the church reflected our longing for personal and national restoration (Leviticus 25; Luke 4:16–21). We realized that it was only through the gospel of Jesus Christ that people could be reconciled to God and one another, especially in a country as divided as South Africa. The gospel became the foundation of all we attempted to do. (This aspect of evangelicalism will be discussed in greater depth in chapter four.)

A deep sense of repentance for our involvement in the sin of apartheid arose among the leadership and congregants. There was an attempt not merely to regard sin, salvation and the mission of the church as private, individual matters, but to engage with the unjust South African social order as concerned Christians. This took the form of preaching the gospel, prayer, protest, building a nonracial community, supporting township communities under siege, and engaging with the police over matters of injustice and brutality.

Soon after commencing this church leadership role, a national state of emergency was declared in South Africa (1985). At the time I was involved in planting a multicultural church in the township of Khayelitsha in the Western Cape. The establishment of this congregation and the financing of a church centre were seen as a means of making restitution for years of injustice. Passages such as Luke 4:18–19 and 19:1–10 provided the biblical impetus to finance the work in Khayelitsha. Restitution was also made by individuals from earnings accrued through property bought under the infamous Group Areas Act. We believed restitution needed to touch our assets accumulated during the apartheid years. As a largely white suburban

congregation, we raised a considerable amount of money towards the building and development of a church centre in Khayelitsha. The centre was used for the congregation, the establishment of a crèche to serve the surrounding community, as well as training and income-generating activities. I was able to sell the house we owned and give a portion of the proceeds to the work in Khayelitsha as part of our own personal restitution.

Passages such as Ephesians 2 and what was modeled in the church in Antioch (Acts 13) became foundational in shaping our spiritual understanding that we are now part of God's new society. We took part in various mass protest actions regarding police complicity in township violence and ongoing state injustice in the prevailing state of emergency, etc. We began to realize, through our involvement with marginalized communities, that it was precisely in such a context that we needed a biblical spirituality. Our fledgling congregation in the sprawling township of Khayelitsha was faced with the challenge of working out our evangelical witness and spirituality in a now very volatile apartheid South Africa. The church was multicultural from its inception in the mid-eighties as a sign of racial reconciliation through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Enrolment for a BTh with the University of South Africa (Unisa) in 1990 and exposure to other theologies, including liberation theologians with a concern for the oppressed, greatly helped to challenge my narrow, privatized spirituality. It was very helpful and healing to participate in the Khayelitsha pastors' fraternal and gain insight into the struggles of township life from church leaders across the denominational spectrum. The friendships formed and experiences shared during those traumatic years were very special. However, it was ultimately the encouragement of the Scriptures (Romans 15:4) and the leading of the Spirit of God that gave us endurance and hope. As Maimela notes (1987:117): "In the light of the divine promise that in Christ all things are being made new (2 Cor. 5:17), reality and the human situation for the believing Christian begin to look different. It means now that things need not be accepted as they are because they can be changed; they are amenable to change and are alterable for the better."

A commitment to the Scriptures meant that its moral norms became more decisive than the relative interests of our historical context. Preaching God's word faithfully

and consistently during those troubled years greatly helped to challenge our privatized Christianity, and comfort those whose lives were being torn apart by unrest and violence. One of the many encouragements during that time was a visit to the congregation by one of the members of the TRC following my submission regarding my involvement in cross-border destabilization while in the SAN. Standing in the service, she declared: “We have heard a lot of truth over the past months; today I have also seen real reconciliation at work.”

After transferring the leadership of the growing Khayelitsha church to a local Xhosa-speaking pastor, I began pastoring a multicultural congregation in Pietermaritzburg in 1998. The church was playing a significant, leading role in our city, alongside a number of other churches. Specific initiatives included work among the poor, working with families affected and infected with HIV/Aids, operating a pregnancy crisis centre, running a school, an overnight shelter, a home for abused women and children, caring for orphans, addressing unemployment through job creation, establishing a tourism initiative, manufacturing craft for local and overseas markets, establishing a number of successful black economic empowerment (BEE) initiatives, and receiving teams of young people from all over the world as part of church and cross-cultural exchanges. Various evangelical and charismatic churches ran these projects and outreach programmes through a non-governmental organization (NGO) called Project Gateway, located on the site of the old Pietermaritzburg prison. The churches provided leadership, training and pastoral care to the project as a whole. I was CEO of Project Gateway for a number of years while pastoring our local congregation. In 2006 we placed the project in the hands of black leadership as part of our transformation and sustainability focus. During this time we developed a church-based model of working with the poor, through much trial and error. This involved continuing to preach the gospel, disciple new believers and empower previously disadvantaged people, tackling transformation, working to create financially sustainable projects and small, medium and/or micro enterprises (SMMEs), and trying to secure funding for the projects from government departments.

Our local congregation, Pietermaritzburg Christian Fellowship, was formed as an amalgamation of Afrikaans, Zulu and English-speaking congregations that came together in 1992 as a prophetic sign of Christian reconciliation in a country torn apart by racial hatred. Once again, we learnt many lessons and experienced many

disappointments along the way. We also experienced times of deep joy and breakthrough. During the 1990s we faced a fresh set of challenges both in the local church, and in our work among the poor in a rapidly changing South Africa.

We discovered that the parameters of a genuinely Christian spirituality are pre-eminently the Scriptures worked out in obedience to the Holy Spirit in needy local communities. It was from the Scriptures and the leading of the Spirit of God that we received encouragement, direction and hope during times of extreme hopelessness. The scriptures also greatly helped in the shaping of our Christian Spirituality. These experiences are closely linked to the aim of this dissertation.

1.6 The aim of this dissertation in the current South African context

This dissertation contains an academic investigation of what constitutes a biblical spirituality and how it can impact evangelical and charismatic churches in contemporary South Africa. Unless the theology and practice of church members changes and deepens, the church will not become an agent of transformation, but will remain part of the problem in an unequal and divided society. The pressing question is: What contribution can a genuine, biblical spirituality make in the challenging post-apartheid South African context? This issue is important as church and society face an increasingly complex array of challenges in post-apartheid South Africa. I believe that evangelical and charismatic churches have a significant contribution to make because, historically, they have united the Bible, spirituality and society closely, as we shall see in the next chapter.

This dissertation proposes a biblical spirituality in South African evangelical and charismatic churches that avoids the dangers of separating faith and life, resulting in a privatized faith that is largely an escape from life. It is also necessary to avoid linking faith and life in a way that promotes an unjust civil religion such as the previous apartheid social order. We need a biblically influenced spirituality that transforms the life of Christians, who in turn can have a transforming effect on their communities.

Historically, the Bible was used in South Africa to uphold apartheid, causing profound ambiguity concerning the use of the Scriptures in shaping a genuine Christian spirituality in society. This is deeply unfortunate and tragic, given the fact that the

majority of people in South Africa identify with the Christian faith. There are significant lessons for the evangelical church to learn from our recent history in order to have a more constructive impact on both church communities and society at large. To assist in that process, this dissertation will argue for the importance of a biblical spirituality in the current South African context.

Although there has been much progress since 1994 in a number of areas of societal life in addressing the injustices of the past, a myriad challenges remain in society, government, and the church. With the miracle of the transition of power and the birth of democracy in 1994 now well behind us, society still faces the need for authentic church and political leadership, the problems of rising unemployment, the Aids pandemic, the lack of moral restraint, high crime levels and the need to redistribute resources to redress massive inequality. The statistics highlighting these challenges are becoming increasingly public 16 years later. According to the South African Institute of Race Relations:

While Stats SA puts the official unemployment rate at under 25 percent, its definition requires that jobless South Africans actively look for work to be classified as unemployed. The proportion of South Africans, who want to work but cannot find a job, or make no effort to find one, is closer to 45 percent. Today, a quarter of all South Africans receive social welfare. In the absence of an effective public education system, such dependency is forecast to continue. Only half of the roughly one million children who were in grade ten in 2006 wrote their outcomes-based education matric exams in 2008. Of the original 2006 cohort, only 30 percent passed, while 8 percent passed the mathematics exam.

On the health front, the government's efforts have not been successful. The proportion of pregnant woman testing positive for HIV increased from 1 percent in the early 1990s to close on 30 percent by the mid-2000s. Life expectancy has fallen from 63 in the late 1980s to 50 today. More than any crime prevention strategy or BEE policy, simply fixing a crisis in the family will serve our future well.

On the political side, there are also risk factors. Having had four separate presidents since 1994, South Africa has broken with the "president for life" model of governance that afflicted other African states post liberation. But although our election processes remain democratic, the results may not be. It is likely that Parliament and the government will henceforth be regarded as sub-committees of the ANC.⁶

There are growing signs of a rising culture of entitlement and abuse in government as the nation struggles to chart a new course away from a repressive past. The corruption charges brought by the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) against

⁶Frans Cronje, Deputy CEO of the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), forecasts SA likely to maintain status quo, *Sunday Independent*, 17 May 2009.

leaders such as Jacob Zuma, and the inability of the ruling ANC to remove or discipline members guilty of gross misconduct have caused the ruling party to lose the moral high ground gained through the struggle against apartheid. Yet President Zuma calls for the rooting out of corruption and incompetence. South Africa faces an ethical disaster as personal moral apathy and lawlessness are on the increase, and both violent and white-collar crime has become endemic. Although the majority of the population still claims to be Christian, the situation remains dire as the nation becomes spiritually disconnected from a Judaeo-Christian ethical foundation. South Africa is a microcosm of global society, influenced by local African tradition and religious developments on the African continent, North and South America, Europe and Asia. It presents a real and growing challenge to an authentic Christian spirituality.

These developments have contributed to the current spiritual and moral situation in South Africa, and present a challenge to a distinctive Christian spirituality.

All facets of spirituality and ethics that occur throughout the world occur in microcosm in South Africa, from traditional to ultramodern, from absolute to relative, from singular to pluralistic. Multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious ideas and practices as well as the complete set of secular opinions and options permeate the South African context. (Stravidis 2001:81)

The fact that sectors of the evangelical and charismatic church in South Africa have historically failed to apply the biblical text radically and consistently, has resulted in the authenticity of the text itself being doubted, i.e. a holistic Christian spirituality anchored in the Bible. The two philosophies of dualism and individualism, prevalent among conservative evangelicals, have produced a faith in which context is largely ignored while the focus is almost exclusively on the 'spiritual' needs of the individual. As a result the impact of our experience of God has not been felt in society. A return to a biblical expression or a close association of theology and life, between knowing and doing as part of the theological method itself, will greatly strengthen the church's witness to the Lordship of Christ over all of life.

Positively, the church is still favourably positioned to have a lasting impact on local South African communities. The church is still seen as a fairly stable, value-based institution:

Its regular and predictable system of governance and availability of resources (people and finances), despite not always being wealthy, are

clear. The fact that it is non-partisan and situated in a fixed place (as it serves the entire community and usually has an existing building structure) and furthermore, conforms to a moral order of checks and balances, ensures that the local congregation is perfectly situated for community transformation. (Oladipo 2000:146-147)

Although historically complicit in the establishment and sanctioning of apartheid, the church in South Africa also played a significant and positive role in critiquing and bringing the apartheid system to an end. For example, as early as December 1960, the Cottesloe Consultation was organized by the World Council of Churches (WCC), following the brutal Sharpeville massacre in March 1960. The Cottesloe Declaration contained a theological rejection of apartheid and racism.

In 1985 the Kairos Document confronted the church with an ethical choice: to support apartheid or those who were resisting it. "It is not an overstatement to claim that the Church, in its relation to the raging anti-*apartheid* struggle at the time, was never the same again. The voice of the *Kairos Document* reverberated around the world as many saw the political role in society in a new light, and made radical and prophetic commitments to work for change in their corner of the globe" (Ntlha 2009:294).

The Rustenburg Declaration in 1990 was signed at a conference with delegates from more than 85 South African churches. It was one of the most representative church conferences held in South Africa. Part of the Declaration (Alberts and Chikane 1991:277) reads:

As representatives of the Christian Church in South Africa, we confess our sin and acknowledge our part in the heretical policy of apartheid which has led to such extreme suffering for so many in our land. We denounce apartheid, in its intention, its implementation and its consequences as an evil policy. The practice and defence of apartheid as though it were biblically and theologically legitimated is an act of disobedience to God, a denial of the gospel of Jesus Christ and a sin against our unity in the Holy Spirit.

The Declaration appealed to political leaders to repeal all apartheid laws and negotiate a new and just order for the country.

The present challenge for the evangelical church is to demonstrate a biblical approach to the relationship between the church and the world that is described as "witness", neither escapist nor merely activist. Evangelicals in particular should be

concerned to live out the gospel, not just give mental assent to a list of doctrines. Part of this concern is to see the reconnection between our theology and spirituality, for “theology is to establish a framework within which spirituality is to be set” (McGrath 1999:28).

Alternatively, a lack of genuine prophetic leadership and the abandonment of Kingdom ethics (and the Lordship of Christ over all life) will foster the ongoing privatization of faith and resultant disengagement of the church from society. This in turn accelerates the process of secularization and its influence over politics, welfare, science and medicine. Secularization is the declining transformative social impact of the Christian faith, alongside a growing tendency in the population to look increasingly to the government to bring lasting societal change. Secularization has been exacerbated as the current ANC government reacts to the damaging effects of Christian nationalism by the previous regime and the increasing effects of globalization. Historically, many functions, previously the domain of religious institutions, have become secularized. Many welfare, medical and educational services are now provided by the state, leading to further disengagement from the presuppositions of religious faith.

Current interest in spirituality is evidence of the need for correctives in the Christian faith and life in the midst of our current technological, informational and materialistic society. Understanding the importance of these recent trends and formulating a response in the church and society will help to foster a Christian spirituality that addresses the totality of life. As will be shown in relation to the specific areas of culture, poverty and leadership, what is needed is a holistic, biblical spirituality that changes the individual and Christian communities in such a way that there is a transformative effect on society. In this way the spirituality of the individual and the Christian community becomes biblical in character, and faith is applied practically in South African society.

1.7 Outline of Chapters

The dissertation is divided into six main chapters. This introductory chapter has shown that there is a need to recover a truly biblical spirituality for both personal and societal transformation in the context of a rapidly changing post-apartheid South Africa to be realized. *Chapter two* will discuss who the evangelicals and charismatics

are, and their impact globally and in South Africa. In *chapter three* the methodology employed in this dissertation will be discussed, and the need for a biblical spirituality explained. This focus has been informed by my own spiritual journey, as already noted. *Chapter four* examines the spirituality of the New Testament church in the context of Israel and the Roman Empire between 4 BC and 64 AD. The book of Acts, and particularly Acts 6:1–7 has been chosen in order to demonstrate how the early church practised a holistic spirituality amidst the pressing challenges of poverty, diversity of culture, and the need for credible spiritual leadership. The value and importance of a biblical spirituality for the evangelical and charismatic church in South Africa today is discussed in *chapter five*, with particular application to poverty, issues of culture, and leadership challenges. A *sixth chapter* is a reflection on the need for the rediscovery of a biblical spirituality to bring inner renewal and transformational ministry to evangelical and charismatic South African churches today. The concluding *chapter seven* sums up the central arguments of the preceding chapters and indicates what the church should be contributing to the task of nation building.

Chapter two: Who are the evangelicals and charismatics?

In this chapter I will define the words “evangelical” and “charismatic”, identify the theological and spiritual strengths and weaknesses pertaining to these groups, and note their particular development in South Africa. I will examine how South African evangelicalism has been influenced both positively and negatively by these factors, which have in turn contributed to the need for a truly biblical spirituality that encompasses both personal and societal dimensions.

2.1 Evangelicals and the growth of evangelicalism

The meaning of the term “evangelical” is not always clear, and the term may mean different things to different people, depending on their context. The historical roots of the movement have not always been appreciated, even within evangelicalism. A further complication is the fact that evangelicals do not always agree with each other.

“Evangelical” is a term associated with that form of Christianity flowing out of the Protestant Reformation, which stressed belief in the gospel and a life lived in the light of the gospel. The rediscovery of the Bible for all believers that led to the Reformation and later Evangelical Awakening was focused on biblical preaching and faith, rather than sacramentalism and church tradition.

In one of the most useful general definitions of this phenomenon, the British historian David Bebbington (1998:3) has identified the key ingredients of evangelicalism as “conversionism (an emphasis on the ‘new birth’ as a life-changing religious experience), Biblicism (a reliance on the Bible as ultimate religious authority), activism (a concern for sharing the faith), and crucicentrism (a focus on Christ’s redeeming work on the cross)”. These common features of evangelicalism undergird an immense variety of expressions of and differences in theology, denomination, social characteristics and geographical location.

The etymology of evangelical is simple. It comes from the Greek word *evangelion* or “evangel” which is the New Testament word for gospel. Historically the term evangelical meant literally “gospeler”. It was a term used by Protestants who identified with the reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone. (Sproul 1995:21)

David Walker (1993:16) defines “evangelical” as follows:

It describes the conviction of those who believe in salvation by God's grace received by faith alone. This salvation is provided through the death and resurrection of Christ and is totally unmerited. The Bible is viewed as the final authority for faith and life. It is to be studied and obeyed and is a crucial element in the life of faith. Evangelicals are often associated with the term "born-again". This is seen as the transformation of the individual by the power of the Holy Spirit issuing in new patterns of behaviour and involving following Christ and being his witnesses in the world.

By evangelical I mean those Christians who see the importance of personal salvation by faith in the atoning death of Christ as contained in the Scriptures:

Modern Evangelicalism, like Protestantism, of which it is part, traces its roots to the early reformers. Luther's teaching of justification by faith alone, the priesthood of believers and the authority of the Word of God as contained in the Scriptures – teachings which shaped Protestantism from the beginning – are important to modern Evangelicalism. (Ntlha 2005:19)

The word "evangelical" has a long history. It was applied to the Reformers in the 16th century; the Puritans in England and the Pietists in Germany in the 17th century; and came into widespread use in the early 18th century with the Evangelical Revival of John Wesley and George Whitefield. "Evangelicalism in its origins was overwhelmingly a movement of spiritual renewal" (Noll 2004:221). It was this evangelistic energy that led to the numerical growth of churches between the middle and the end of the 19th century:

The Free Churches of England and Wales, which were overwhelmingly evangelical, increased from roughly 1,021,000 members in 1850 to 1,803,000 in 1900. In the United States, the figures are even more impressive. Methodists increased from rather over one and a quarter million members to about five and a half million members over the second half of the nineteenth century. Baptists rose from about three quarters of a million to about four and a half million (Bebbington 2005:236).

To place this in perspective, Europe's population doubled during the 18th century, from roughly 100 million to almost 200 million, and doubled again during the 19th century, to about 400 million.⁷

Globally, most evangelicals now live in China, South Korea, India, Africa and Latin America. In 1960, there were an estimated 50 million evangelical Christians in the West, and 25 million in the rest of the world. Today there are an estimated 75 million in the West, and 325 million in the rest of the world, representing about 20 percent of

⁷en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial_Revolution, accessed 18 November 2010.

the 2 billion Christians worldwide, according to Robert Kilgore, chairman of the missionary board Christar.⁸

In Africa, Christianity has spread spectacularly over the past century. Philip Jenkins notes that we are currently living through one of the most transformative moments in the history of religion worldwide as “the centre of gravity in the Christian world has shifted southwards to Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Already today, the largest Christian communities on the planet are to be found in Africa and Latin America” (2002:2). The old mission base of Europe and North America has become a mission field for Christianity. Moreover, the Christian faith is in significant competition with other faiths such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam, which have seen resurgence in recent years. “In part this renewal has itself been a reaction to the missionary activity of Christianity. To some extent there has come an identification of religion with the emerging nationalism that has been such a feature of the anti-colonial and now post-colonial experience of the second half of the twentieth century” (Robinson 2001:73). These religious and national challenges for the church occur in conjunction with a worldwide growth of interest in spirituality from those outside the church, who hold a worldview which is not based on the authority of the Bible or the church. According to Jenkins (2002:56):

It was precisely as western colonialism ended that Christianity began a period of explosive growth that still continues unchecked, above all in Africa. Just since 1965, the Christian population of Africa has risen from about a quarter of the continental total to about 46%, stunning growth for so short a period. To quote the 2001 edition of the *World Christian Encyclopaedia*, “the present net increase on that continent is 8.4 million new Christians a year (23,000 a day) of which 1.5 million are net new converts (converts minus defections or apostasies)”. Sometime in the 1960s, another historic landmark occurred, when Christians first outnumbered Moslems in Africa.

2.2 The history of evangelicals

While evangelicalism recognizes only one main authoritative source – the gospel of Jesus Christ – there are important historical influences that need to be noted.

⁸*Philadelphia Inquirer*, 20 Feb 2006, www.crusadewatch.org, accessed 1 July 2009.

2.2.1 The magisterial reformation

The mainstream Reformation or magisterial reformation (16th century) of noted reformers such as Martin Luther (1483–1546) and John Calvin (1509–1564) reformed the structures, doctrine and spirituality of the then powerful Catholic Church along more biblical lines.⁹ The cry of the Reformation became: *Sola scriptura* (Scripture is the sole authority in faith and practice), *sola fide* (justification is by faith alone), and *sola gratias* (salvation is by grace alone). This was in reaction to the teaching of the Catholic Church that church tradition was also authoritative, and good works (merit) were important for salvation.

“The evangelical witness affirms the primacy of Scripture as the only infallible rule of faith and practice. This cannot be stressed enough. Scripture has primacy over other writings; primacy over church tradition; primacy over individual religious experience; primacy over the individual conscience; primacy over individual revelations, dreams, and visions; primacy over culture” (DG Bloesch in Foster 1999:222). The doctrine of justification by faith in Christ alone, scripture as the sole authority in doctrinal matters, and an emphasis on preaching the gospel served as cohesive forces for evangelicals.

2.2.2 The Puritans

The Puritans were radical English Protestants in the 16th and 17th centuries who wished to purify the Church of England from within of aspects of church life and doctrine they deemed to be Catholic, or not sufficiently biblical and committed to the gospel. They wanted to “purify” the Anglican Church in accordance with the Bible, which they accepted as the infallible rule of faith and life, and change the Episcopal state church into a Presbyterian or Congregational Church. This led to their being named Puritans after 1560. According to Eaton (1989:75):

It is well-known that the term “Puritan” is difficult to define and means different things to different people. My own view is that it must be accepted that the modern use of the term “Puritan” does not precisely conform to its use between 1564 (earliest use of the term) and 1642. I use the term to refer to all British Protestant Christians between Tyndale and the events of 1662 who wished to see the continuation of the reformation and a more radical application of scriptural principles to the churches.

⁹It should also be noted that evangelicalism has historical roots in earlier Christian epochs besides the Reformation, Puritanism and Pietism. McGrath (1995:15) writes: “It is generally accepted that attitudes towards the personal appropriation of salvation and the spiritual importance of reading of Scripture which would now be called ‘Evangelical’ emerged from Italian Benedictine monasteries during the late 5th century.”

In the United Kingdom and United States of America the Puritans were known for their radical application of faith to life.

They wanted the Church of England to be reorganized along reformed lines, with a Presbyterian form of government. They shared Anabaptist beliefs that sought the ideal of New Testament Christianity, which included new birth by the Spirit, personal appropriation of faith and the high personal ethical standards. Puritan influence spread to the American colonies where it helped shape political and social institutions. (Ntlha 2005:23)

2.2.3 Pietism

Pietism, which began in Germany in the 17th century, emphasized the positive place of the gospel experience in the Christian life in reaction to the trends of orthodoxy, formalism and rationalistic forms of theological argumentation. This was a reaction from several German Lutherans and Reformed churches to the dry spiritual state of their church, emphasizing an internal, experiential, individual return to Bible study and prayer. “Its roots go back to mysticism, but it represented mostly a reaction to the barren intellectualism of Orthodoxy, which is why it placed so much emphasis on personal piety” (Botha 1978:92). Pietism played a major role in Protestantism in the 17th and 18th centuries, and still influences Protestant churches today. “In addition to the infusion of fresh spiritual vigour into the Lutheran Church, Pietism resulted in the founding of the Moravian Church by Count von Zinzendorf (1700–1760)” (Cairns 1981:381).

2.2.4 The Great Awakening

According to Alexander Venter and Moss Ntlha (2005:149-151), evangelicalism has its roots not only in the Protestant reformed faith of the 16th and 17th centuries, but also in the Great Awakenings and evangelical missions of the 18th and 19th centuries. They were characterized by a basic integration of personal faith and social political engagement on the basis of a biblical understanding of the Kingdom of God and gospel mission.

Traditional evangelicals like John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, and Charles Finney preached and practised reconciliation both as salvation for individuals and societies in the revivals or Great Awakenings of the 18th and 19th centuries. Cassidy notes (2005:98):

One of the most notable features of the Wesleyan revival in England, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, is that there was a species of Holy

Spirit "pincer movement" where God was working through his servants both among the powerful and the powerless. People like Wilberforce and Shaftesbury and the famous Clapham Set were seeking to reach people in Parliament and in the professions, and challenge them with the implications of Christian faith, while the Wesleys and Whitefield and others were reaching the masses in a very effective way. The overall consequence under God was the mighty Wesleyan revival which totally changed England, abolished the slave trade and positively affected many other parts of the world.

2.2.5 Reaction to the social gospel

The factors that gave rise to the social gospel included the rapid growth of capitalism, the social problems caused by industrialization, labour unrest, urbanization, housing shortages and poverty.

At the end of the 19th and in the early 20th century evangelicals reacted to the social gospel which emerged from a largely liberal theological framework. The social gospel movement arose in the United States of America in the second half of the 19th century in the teachings of men such as Walter Rauschenbusch (1861–1918) and was paralleled with social Christianity in England, for instance FD Maurice (1805–1872). In Germany, Friederich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), Albrecht Ritschl (1822–1889), and Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) questioned the historicity of the Old and New Testament narrative accounts, and the Bible's claim to God's supernatural activity. Liberal Protestants questioned or rejected the divine inspiration and authority of the Bible as historical-critical approaches to the Bible developed, while evangelical Protestants continued to accept the authority of the Bible.

European and North American evangelicalism were therefore divided into those who stressed ecumenism and social renewal on the left and those who stressed confessional orthodoxy and evangelism on the right. Historically, some evangelicals resisted an increasingly liberal interpretation of Scripture and a social gospel approach. Politically and theologically conservative evangelicals often fostered an individualized Christianity that was theoretically apolitical in stance, but often supported the religious right in practice. It produced an approach to the Christian faith in which social context was largely ignored while it focused almost exclusively on the spiritual needs of the individual. Interestingly, the neo-orthodox theology of Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer's ministry in the Confessing Church were evangelical in the true sense, focusing on adherence to the gospel of Jesus Christ in difficult social

contexts. Both taught and practised reconciliation within a broader understanding of God's covenant with creation and society, not just with individual human beings. During the 20th century, evangelicals needed to position themselves with reference to the issues of biblical criticism and the emergence of the social gospel.

One positive result of 19th century liberal theology was its consistent criticism of the church and its theologians for their failure to exercise their prophetic ministry. It also led to a new understanding of the relationship between the Christian faith and the socio-economic-political order.

The fundamentalism of the 19th and early 20th century which emerged as a response to biblical criticism saw conservative evangelicals such as BB Warfield (1851–1921), RA Torrey (1856–1928), and J Gresham Machen (1881–1937) defending the most fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith by engaging the prevailing culture. Fundamentalism involves a conservative approach to Scripture and it is “a response to the kind of unbelief that denied the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, and the physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead” (Carson 2005:160). Later use of the term, however, associated it with negativism, fear, cultural withdrawal and religious conservatism. Post-1925 fundamentalism saw a marked retreat and separation from engagement and transformation of the broader culture. In “the 1960s and 1970s, evangelical growth was paralleled by evangelical division over the inerrancy of Scripture” (Ware 2008:2621). This led to the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy in 1978 as the most widely used and definitive statement on the subject in conservative evangelicalism.

Gabriel Fackre of Andover Newton School of Theology discerns at least six varieties of evangelicals in these periods and emphases in evangelicalism (in McGrath 1995:107):

- Fundamentalists. Here “ultra-inerrancy is the criterion of faithfulness”, associated with the “polemical and separatist mentality that characterizes every religious and secular fundamentalism”. The movement is often apolitical but can be associated with right-wing political causes.
- Old evangelicals. Here the experiential (or “affective”) side of faith assumes priority, with the “personal experience of regeneration being of decisive importance, together with its expression in mass evangelism”.
- New evangelicals. Here Fackre refers to “neo-evangelicalism” with its characteristic emphasis on “the social import of faith and its apologetic persuasiveness”.

- Justice and peace evangelicals. These “activist evangelicals advocate a political agenda drastically at variance with the religious right”. In many ways this strand in contemporary evangelicalism deliberately espouses a radical political agenda associated with 16th century Anabaptists.
- Charismatic evangelicals. This section of the movement places emphasis on “glossolalia, healing and celebrative worship”, with a strong emphasis on the person and work of the Holy Spirit.
- Ecumenical evangelicals. This group, “more a tendency than a constituency”, is concerned to move evangelicalism “towards relationships with the larger Christian community”. Of particular importance are its “alliances with mainline Christians on common social concerns”.

Drawing on several of the elements noted above, in my understanding, an evangelical is someone who believes in the atoning work of Christ on the cross, the Bible as the word of God, in personal conversion through faith in the finished work of Christ, and the outworking of the gospel in the totality of life, i.e. that the personal elements of faith need to be integrated with its social implications. The point of evangelical scholarship is the ability to hold together an evangelical, biblical witness for devotion and faith on the one hand, and to be deeply aware of the social context, and committed to applying the biblical text within that context on the other hand. Evangelicalism has not always achieved this because of its fixation on peripheral and nonessential matters, while ignoring the larger matters of gospel reconciliation and social justice. This was particularly evident in the general response of evangelicals in apartheid South Africa.

2.3 Evangelicalism in South Africa

Evangelicalism in South Africa is a wide movement with many antecedents and strands. There are evangelicals in every church from the Roman Catholic Church to the African independent churches. The South Africa movement has been affected by the strengths and weaknesses of evangelicalism globally. The definition of what it means to be evangelical in South Africa has been influenced by our colonial and apartheid history and challenges. This has led to the development of specific evangelical self-understandings in the South African milieu. Mathole (2005:36) notes:

In our nation a remarkable change has taken place amongst Pentecostal-Charismatic evangelicals. Many of the Pentecostal-Charismatic evangelical churches that were once considered socially irrelevant and politically naïve have now transformed. In the post-apartheid South Africa they have begun to play a significant role in nation building. Some have shifted from an apolitical stance in their witness. Pentecostal-Charismatic evangelicals are now faced with contextual realities characterised by issues such as poverty, HIV/Aids, and moral degeneration. They have to

deal with these serious and complex issues if they are to be authentic heralds of the gospel.

The social turmoil South Africa experienced produced both conservative and radical developments in evangelicalism. Initially, churches were started as a result of missionary and settler influences from Europe and North America. “During the early 19th century, after the Cape Colony was finally annexed by Britain, Scottish ministers – such as Murray, Thom, Smith, Taylor, Robertson, Edgar, Morgan, Reid, Sutherland and Thompson began to replace Dutch ministers in South African pulpits. They brought with them an orthodox evangelical piety” (Bosch1990:187). The Cape Colony was later to be deeply impacted by a series of evangelistic revivals in the 1860s led by Andrew Murray Snr (1848–1917). Reformed pietism is still a major force in the Dutch Reformed Church. However, you can also observe the disastrous effects of quietism and a dualistic understanding of reality. Quietism emphasizes personal faith to the exclusion of involvement in the public realm. Another movement, the opposite of quietism, was a merging of a distorted Calvinism with Afrikaner nationalism that produced a theological defence of apartheid.

In South Africa the influence of evangelicals has been vast and mixed. During the dark days of apartheid, there was a strong tendency in evangelical theology to confuse biblical and political conservatism, and to be dualistic rather than upholding a genuine biblical social ethic. Many evangelical churches have remained racially segregated while upholding a firm theoretical belief in “one body and one Spirit” (Ephesians 4:4). Evangelicals in South Africa from 1948 to 1990 can be “divided into at least three groups: conservative, moderate and radical” (Kretzschmar 1998b:163). The conservative group was conservative in its theology and politics and was influenced by biblical fundamentalism. They were highly critical of the “political ideology” of those resisting apartheid, while mistakenly believing that their own understanding of the gospel was free from political ideology. The moderates rejected apartheid without resisting it, and enjoyed the benefits of the prevailing unjust socio-political order. Radical evangelicals, in their theological critique of apartheid, attempted to bring their Christian commitment and activism to bear on the socio-political realm. They attempted to recover the socially involved evangelical and biblical roots of evangelicalism.

In the third world, the issues behind biblical authority relate more to orthopraxis than to orthodox doctrine. That is to say, right living in

obedience to biblical revelation and teaching is more important than right doctrine. It is an insistence that the biblical teaching on justice must affect the way Christians live in society. (Ntlha 2005:27)

As white evangelicals in South Africa were often intellectually and culturally rooted in the United States and Europe, they were often blind to the long-term effects of Western exploitation and domination in Africa and other areas of the third world. During the 1980s black evangelicals in groups such as Concerned Evangelicals exposed and resisted the way in which the ideological commitments of white evangelicals had influenced their understanding of the gospel. This in turn helped evangelicals face the challenges of political oppression and exploitation in South Africa. Their critique was well articulated in the Evangelical Witness in South Africa (EWISA) document of 1986. In this way the experience of South Africans influenced the development of a more holistic evangelical approach, while resisting reductionist versions of the gospel.

“In 1994, Concerned Evangelicals, which was predominantly black, amalgamated with the Evangelical Fellowship of South Africa (EFSA), which was predominantly white, to form The Evangelical Alliance of South Africa (TEASA)” (Ngoetjana 2005:44). TEASA, born out of the excitement of the 1994 democratic elections, became an organization embracing a wide movement of evangelicals and charismatics in South Africa with many antecedents and strands. The past 15 years have been a period of significant growth for TEASA.

TEASA denominations combined have experienced remarkable growth over the past 10 years. Almost 6,000,000 people claimed to belong to Evangelical denominations in 1991. This increased to about 12,000,000 in 2001. If projected to 2004, the number increases to almost 14,000,000. This is a two-fold increase over 10 years. The average annual growth rate (AAGR) is 6.73 percent since 1991. (Teichert 2005:79)

This growth has had a profound influence on evangelicalism in South Africa. Today evangelicalism in South Africa is a transdenominational phenomenon, and there is an overlap between the groupings. Moss Ntlha (2005:26) notes six possible groups:

- Evangelical minorities. Those evangelicals who are part of a denomination where they are in a minority.
- Evangelical majorities. Some evangelicals are in denominations where they are in the majority.
- Evangelical denominations. These are evangelical churches that are totally evangelical.

- Evangelical independents. These are new churches that are not in denominational structures, but occur as individual congregations.
- Pentecostals. These are evangelical churches that embrace the doctrine of speaking in tongues as evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit.
- Charismatic. These are churches which have, since the sixties and seventies, been involved in the Charismatic Renewal. They are found in both the so-called mainline churches as well as the independent newer churches.

We will now briefly discuss the Charismatic Movement.

2.4 Charismatics

The Charismatic Movement or Neo-Pentecostalism

is a modern world-wide movement, predominantly lay, now found among members of all the major Christian denominations, including the Roman Catholic Church. Its distinctive feature is an emphasis on the practice of the charismatic gifts described in the New Testament (cf. 1 Corinthians 12–14), normally preceded by the spiritual experience called in Pentecostal terminology the “baptism in the Holy Spirit”. The doctrine of Spirit-baptism is undoubtedly the central teaching within Pentecostal and Charismatic theology emerging out of the mighty Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles in 1906. It emerged as an identifiable movement at the beginning of the 1960s in the United States and Great Britain, then in other western European countries and finally all over the world, including the third world. (Wakefield 1983:85)

The Charismatic Renewal has become one of the most significant religious phenomena of the 20th century, and became so widespread that the second half of the century could be remembered as the age of pentecostal-charismatic Christianity. The popular rebirth of interest in spirituality is part of the legacy of the Charismatic Movement.

2.4.1 The history of the Charismatic Movement

The Charismatic Movement draws heavily on the New Testament record which is rooted in the experience of the day of Pentecost and can point to earlier movements of God’s Spirit in church history. Du Plessis (in Hofmeyr 1990:310), commenting on Pentecostal theology, notes:

Enthusiast groups whose distinctive marks had been transposed particularly into Pentecostalism include among others Montanism of the second century, Mysticism from the twelfth and thirteenth, Anabaptism from the sixteenth, the latter Reformation and Pietism from the seventeenth, Methodism from the eighteenth, and American revivalism and the Holiness movement from the nineteenth century.

The Charismatic Movement emerged from Pentecostalism, which had its roots in early Methodism, revivalism, and the holiness movement. The central doctrine of pentecostal and charismatic theology is Spirit-baptism. Charismatic believers emphasise the Holy Spirit in their theology and practice. "They seek to revive the kind of spirituality and ministry that characterised the early church; to practise those charismatic gifts, worship, signs and wonders that it was assumed had subsided in the Church" (Mathole 2005: 34).

Not all evangelicals are charismatic, as some emphasize the new birth rather than subsequent experiences. Conversely, not all charismatics are evangelical; some are Anglo-Catholics or Roman Catholic. It is clear historically that charismatic Christianity impacted evangelicalism as a whole. Since then charismatic Christianity has become a very diverse phenomenon.

The early developments of the Charismatic Movement involved a vast number of churches and individuals from different backgrounds and theological persuasions, and therefore made initial use of a largely oral theology similar to Pentecostalism. Thus in the early stages charismatics were also known as Neo-Pentecostals. It is generally accepted that the first wave of the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement began in about 1901 to 1906 in the Azusa Street revival in America. As discussed in Foster (1999:112), "in the heart of Los Angeles at Azusa Street, a work of the Spirit broke forth in 1906 that was destined to become the fountainhead of a worldwide Pentecostal explosion. William J Seymour was the divinely chosen leader of this work, which came to be known as 'the Azusa Street revival'". The Azusa Street revival was seen as the torch that ignited a worldwide Pentecostal revival in the 20th century. The revival had its roots in 19th century fundamentalism with leaders such as Finney, Torrey and Gordon.

The second wave of this movement occurred in the early 1960s among mainline Protestants (bringing "Pentecost" to the mainline denominations), with a third wave in the 1980s. Third wave churches are "conservative evangelical churches that had opened up to the spiritual dynamics of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements without abandoning their theological moorings. Within the overall flow of church history, Pentecostalism, the Charismatic movement and the 'third wave' had to be considered as a whole" (Morphew 1996:37). The phenomenal growth of the

Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement has been noted by David Barrett in his statistics on world Christianity: “There were over 523 million ‘Pentecostal/Charismatics’ in the world in 2001” (Anderson 2004:11). This stupendous growth has taken place in less than a century. The largest percentage of conservative Christians are being converted in the pentecostal and charismatic groupings. In a 10-nation survey outlining the growth of pentecostal and charismatic Christianity, South Africa had 10% pentecostals, and 24% charismatics of the total population in 2006.¹⁰

The Charismatic Movement planted thousands of vibrant “new” autonomous churches outside the historical church structures, unconnected to the classical pentecostal denominations. It has seen the restoration of the leadership gifts of apostle, prophet, pastor, teacher and evangelist in the church (Ephesians 4:7–11). This, in turn, has led to the establishment of apostolic networks of churches. New “independent” churches developed in response to what God was doing in the church, and at times out of frustration with denominational institutionalism and inflexibility. For many in the new churches, it became an issue of “wineskins” that needed reform in order to contain the “new wine” (Matthew 9:16–17). Henry Lederle¹¹ from the University of South Africa identified the following groups within the Charismatic Renewal, both locally and internationally:

- The Pentecostals. The Charismatic Movement brought renewal to some classic pentecostal denominations, for example the Assemblies of God.
- Roman Catholics. Although the Charismatic Movement only affected the Catholic Church from 1966 with an outbreak (of the baptism with the Holy Spirit) at Duquesne University and at Notre Dame University in 1967, the number of “Catholic Pentecostals” grew rapidly and today make up the larger section of the renewal worldwide.
- Greek Orthodox. Greg Gavrillides, for example, was an important leader among Orthodox Charismatics.
- Messianic Jews. They emphasize evangelism among the Jews, and often challenge Gentile charismatics to work and pray for the “peace of Jerusalem”. Moise Rosen was a well-known leader.
- Communities. Some charismatics believed in the need to form communities with communal property and income.
- Parish renewal. Many charismatics were committed to working towards the renewal of their respective denominations. In South Africa the Anglican Church was influenced by the renewal under the leadership of bishops such as Alpheus Zulu, Bill Burnett, Michael Nuttall, Bruce Evans and Richard Kraft.

¹⁰Laurie Goodstein’s article in *The New York Times*, Oct 2006, pewforum.org/surveys/pentecostal, accessed 3 July 2009.

¹¹Lectures given in 1983 at Hatfield Bible School, Pretoria on the Charismatic Renewal.

- Transdenominational and independent ministries. The Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association (OREA), Teen Challenge (David Wilkinson), Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN, Pat Robertson), and Youth With A Mission (YWAM, Loren Cunningham) and other such ministries have had a significant influence.
- Non-denominational discipleship. This involved groups such as Christian Growth Ministries (CGM) and leaders such as Don Basham, Charles Simpson, Derek Prince, Bob Mumford and Joseph Garlington, who insisted on believer's baptism. In England, the House Church Movement saw itself as a radical restoration movement of the bride of Christ. Their distinctive conviction is the restoration of the two forgotten ministries of apostles and prophets. Leaders in England included Bryn Jones, Arthur Wallace and Terry Virgo. In general, there was a strong commitment to discipleship and the building of relationships within an "apostolic sphere".
- Post-charismatic ecumenical approach. This approach was taken by some who saw themselves as returning to a broader evangelicalism. They wanted to be ecumenical rather than non-denominational.
- Newer charismatic denominations. Whereas the "first wave of the Spirit" at the turn of the century led to the formation of many new denominations, the "second wave" of the 1960s generally encouraged people to remain in their churches. It is possible that the rapid growth of the charismatic part of a small denomination could lead to the formation of a new, totally charismatic denomination. Such a process is more likely to succeed in those denominations which espouse an independent form of church government, giving local congregations unrestricted autonomy.

The Charismatic Movement has major implications for a biblical spirituality as the manifestations of the Holy Spirit are given to benefit others, and are essential to the spirituality and mission of the church today (Acts 1:8; 2:1–13; 1 Corinthians 12:7). In my opinion, the greatest blessing of the Charismatic Renewal has been the awareness of the Person and work of the Holy Spirit, a fresh expectation of the practice of the spiritual gifts and the experiential nature of normal Christian living.

In assessing the Charismatic Movement, Foster (1999:128-131) notes the following strengths and weaknesses:

CHARISMATICS	
<p>STRENGTHS</p> <p>1. Personal and corporate renewal as many Christians have come to a deeper sense of the experience of God. The Scriptures, prayer, worship and a new depth of</p>	<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <p>1. Despite its strengths, many charismatics today seem to have little spirituality worth talking about. There has been the danger of rejecting the rational and intellectual,</p>

<p>conviction in their faith have resulted from personal spiritual renewal. Corporately many churches have been renewed in their worship, fellowship, leadership structures and evangelism through the influence of the Charismatic Movement.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. The charismatic tradition is the ongoing correction to our impulse to domesticate God. All our attempts – both personally and historically – to institutionalize the Holy Spirit ultimately fail. 3. It offers a constant rebuke to our anaemic practice. The charismatic tradition constantly reminds us that the Kingdom of God depends not on talk but on power (1 Corinthians 4:20). 4. It offers a continuing challenge toward spiritual growth and development. It is by the Spirit that we defeat the “works of the flesh”, and it is by the Spirit that we develop the holy habits of love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and generosity and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:19–23). 5. It offers a life of gifting and empowering for witness in service. Signs and wonders, miracles in healings, revelations and visions – these are all part of our walk in the Spirit. 	<p>because the charismatic emphasis is so focused on the emotive side of our faith.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Charismatics have failed to interpret the work of the Holy Spirit in ethical terms, for example Paul’s description of the Spirit producing in us the character of Christ, and living that out in society today (Galatians 5:22–23). Paul’s concern throughout Galatians is with Christian life in community, not with the interior life of the individual Christian alone, thus not creating a dichotomy between personal and social ethics, but creating communities where Christlike virtues and spiritual power are manifest in personal and social dimensions of experience, where the gifts of the Spirit are not divorced from the fruit of the Spirit. This has a direct bearing on the making of disciples in evangelical and charismatic churches. To be a disciple of Jesus is to follow him where he leads us, accepting his lifestyle and teaching for our lives. Inward belief must be accompanied by outward obedience. 3. The danger of trivialization. It is so easy for us to be titillated by various phenomena. The gifts are for the greater good of the Christian fellowship and for our ongoing formation in the way of Christ, rather than self-glorification. 4. The danger of linking our walk in the Spirit to highly speculative end-time scenarios that lack theological foundation.
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In assessing the strengths of the Charismatic Renewal, it becomes evident that Christians individually and corporately have enjoyed a deeper experience of God which has had global ramifications. However, in rejecting the rational and intellectual, the Charismatic Renewal has often failed to produce a distinctive spirituality

grounded in biblical Christian faith and ethical practice, where Jesus Christ is seen to be Lord over the whole of life, not just Lord of “my life”.

The Charismatic Renewal impacted a wide range of church groupings, resulting in a great variety of interpretation of Spirit baptism in the last four decades. The Renewal has had a huge impact on evangelical church groups in South Africa.

2.5 Evangelicals in South Africa

The Charismatic Movement has been a transformative encounter with God that not only brought the restoration of spiritual life to personal Christian experience, but also to the structure of churches. However, many charismatic churches need to perceive and apply the social implications of their faith.

As South Africa moves away from apartheid and systemic racial oppression towards racial reconciliation, the social consciousness of many of the pentecostal-charismatic evangelical churches that were previously socially irrelevant and politically naïve are awaking, enabling them to play a significant role in nation building. This can be seen in the formation of TEASA, which “has brought evangelicals of various denominations, mission agencies, races and streams together for mutual sharing and witness” (Ntlha 2005:16).

The evangelical writer, Michael Cassidy (2005:94-96) calls for a more holistic spirituality. He mentions a number of strengths and weaknesses of evangelicals in Africa (many of which are true of charismatics) that help to assess their biblical spirituality. They are summarized below. In chapter five I explore the implications of a deepening spirituality for these groups.

EVANGELICALS	
<p>STRENGTHS Strengths of a biblical spirituality in South Africa:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The biblical faithfulness and orthodox theology of much of the church across the continent is worthy of much 	<p>WEAKNESSES Weaknesses preventing a biblical spirituality in South Africa:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The largely successful evangelization of Africa has yet to produce a reformation of the continent. Too

<p>thanksgiving in the face of crumbling moral values and flaccid theology in some portions of the Western church.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Within sub-Saharan Africa there is a tremendous fascination with and attraction to the person of Jesus Christ, whereas in much of the West there is an emasculation of the Deity and uniqueness of Jesus. 3. There is a great openness to the supernatural and to the work of the Holy Spirit, particularly in the call to salvation. 4. Africans are ready to grasp the plain sense of the biblical text and not to make it stand on its head by so-called hermeneutical shifts which are so popular among many Western theologians. 5. There is increasing willingness to launch out in witness and evangelism, even when training is modest or inadequate. 6. There is a great eagerness among many African leaders for further training, to advance theologically, and to equip themselves to equip others. 7. People give out of their modest means and sometimes, like the Macedonians of old, out of their extreme poverty (2 Corinthians 8:3). This is a biblical value. 8. A great spirit of prayer undergirds much of the witness, preaching and evangelism of the church in Africa. 	<p>often a salvationist theology has been preached in Africa, rather than the Kingdom theology. This would equip the 400 million Christians across the continent to be salt and light, arresting decay and darkness in Africa.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. A related problem is that of a disturbing willingness to embrace a so-called prosperity gospel message. 3. Sometimes in African evangelism there is a strong inclination towards "easy believism" or what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called "cheap grace". This happens when people are called into commitment without being required to face sufficiently clearly or strongly the demands of discipleship in terms of spiritual, moral and lifestyle change. 4. Local churches need strong discipling programmes connected to evangelism. 5. Evangelism needs to be holistic, bringing our gospel in both word and deed, and seeking to ensure that the faithful presentation of the biblical message is accompanied by compassionate action along with a real socio-political concern for the conditions in which people live. 6. The message needs to be brought in a relevant fashion so that it genuinely relates to the real points of felt need and seeks to answer the real questions which grip people's hearts and minds.
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Cassidy's analysis is of great value in assessing the merits and weaknesses of evangelical Christians and churches in South Africa regarding the establishment of a truly biblical spirituality.

I have offered several definitions and outlined the development of evangelicalism and the Charismatic Movement historically, and in South Africa, in this chapter. I have discussed the strengths, weaknesses and commonality of their respective spirituality, and explained how these movements emerged in distinctive ways in the South African milieu. South African evangelicalism has been influenced both positively and negatively by these factors, and this has, in turn, contributed to the need for a truly biblical spirituality that encompasses both personal and societal dimensions.

I believe that the church in South Africa needs the influence of a deepening biblical spirituality that brings about a transformative process at a personal and societal level. Such a response is essential in the formation of disciples in the evangelical and charismatic church. Such a transformative engagement with the Bible will result in a response of faith and obedience that will impact both the church and society.

In the next chapter, we turn to an explanation of the methodology employed in this dissertation.

Chapter three: Methodological approach

I defined Christian spirituality in the first chapter, and underlined the importance of a biblical spirituality. I provided a brief background sketch of my life to illustrate the way in which evangelicals and charismatics have understood the gospel of Jesus Christ and the role of the church in South Africa

In the previous chapter I discussed in detail who the evangelicals and charismatics are, both globally and locally, highlighting both the unity and the differences between these groups over an extensive historical period. In seeking to develop a biblical spirituality for these churches in 21st century South Africa, it is essential to be aware of the complexity of this theological heritage.

In this chapter, I explain the methodology employed in this dissertation. The approach used is mainly theoretical, involving an analysis of many books on Christian spirituality, biblical spirituality, the evangelicals, charismatics, and the church in South Africa. Particular emphasis is placed on the use of the Bible for the development of a biblical spirituality in the church today. As explained in chapter one, this involves an analysis and application of the biblical text, especially Acts 6:1–7 (see chapters four and five).

Key biblical texts and secondary material pertaining to the subject are collated and related to the experience of the church in South Africa. This means that the relationships between Christian spirituality and theology and between Christian spirituality and the Bible need to be investigated. Therefore, in addition to an exegesis of the relevant biblical texts, many secondary sources from the academic fields of Christian spirituality, theology and biblical studies have been consulted to arrive at a deeper understanding of biblical spirituality.

Chapter four outlines and evaluates the biblical spirituality of the early church, especially as revealed in the book of the Acts of the Apostles. Because of the emphasis, particularly in the Acts 6:1–7 passage, on the issues of poverty, culture and leadership, these three themes will form a major part of the discussion in chapter four. This is necessary to identify key principles and practices of the early church. In chapter five I discuss and apply these principles to a rather different and complex

context, namely 21st century South Africa. As noted in chapter one, because it will not be possible to discuss all the issues pertinent to this contemporary context, poverty, culture and leadership will be analysed with reference to a more holistic, biblical spirituality for evangelicals and charismatic Christians.

The methodology used in this dissertation is also partly empirical. I have not used questionnaires and/or interviews, but have reflected critically on my church experience over many years in diverse South African communities. Descriptions of this experience in chapters five and six will be accompanied by critical reflection on these experiences on the basis of the biblical texts outlined in chapter four. I will further draw on the insights of theologians from both the evangelical and charismatic traditions and from other theological traditions. Christian perspectives from theologians elsewhere and from those writing in the South African context will be employed in this reflective process.

Following an evangelical and charismatic approach to the Bible, the method used in this dissertation involves using the biblical text implicitly and explicitly, and seeing the Bible as a crucial means to deepening the Christian life. The Bible is a primary means of shaping our spirituality. Such an integrated approach that does not separate the Bible from daily living has profound implications for strengthening a holistic or integrated spirituality. I have adopted this evangelical approach that takes the Bible seriously. I also draw on other traditions as secondary sources. As stated earlier, the God that we meet in the Scriptures both sustains and directs our spirituality. This transformative engagement with the Scriptures results in a biblically enriched and shaped spirituality which “deepens the way in which individual Christian and groups experience and practise the presence of God” (Badenhorst 2009:6).

3.1 Christian spirituality and theology

In this section I will show how spirituality, theology and ethics became separated and fragmented historically. Contemporary churches, and especially evangelicals and charismatics, need to be aware of these developments as they attempt to construct and live a biblical spirituality. As mentioned previously, a biblical spirituality must involve a close relationship with the Scriptures and theology as a whole.

There is thus the closest of connections between spirituality and theology. This organic relationship prevents spirituality from degenerating into a human-centred quest for heightened religiosity, for it insists that our

spiritual lives rest securely on the foundation of God's self-revelation. It also keeps a check on theology, preventing it from becoming abstract speculation about God without any appreciation of the importance of "knowing God" for devotion and fulfillment. (McGrath 1995:136)

Early church fathers such as Athanasius and Tertullian did not write about theology as an area of knowledge distinct from pastoral theory and practice. A return to the unity the early church fathers exercised between theology and life (inner and outer dimensions of reality), as part of the theological method, will greatly strengthen the witness of the church to the Lordship of Christ over all of life (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

From the 12th century, Europe saw the increasing separation of spirituality from theology, of affectivity from knowledge, and of spirituality from social praxis and ethics, as the "centres of theological enquiry increasingly moved from the monasteries to new cathedral 'schools' that eventually gave birth to the great European universities" (Sheldrake 1998:39).

Scholasticism not only organized theology into different components, but led reason to triumph over imagination and the ability to define truth outside of sacred experiences. Scholasticism approached theology from a philosophical, rather than a biblical point of view, with the data of revelation being organized systematically by Aristotelian deductive logic and philosophy. The divorce between theology and spirituality which began in the 13th century with the rise of scholasticism had very little relevance to the practice of faith.

This, in turn, gave rise to mysticism as a reaction to the rationalistic tendency of scholasticism. "Sadly, by the high Middle Ages, a split between moral theology (which included spiritual theology), on the one hand, and dogmatic or systematic theology, on the other hand had occurred" (Kretzschmar 2001:87).

Up to the high Middle Ages the study of theology was a unitary endeavour to which the modern divisions of dogmatics (with its subdivisions of theology, Christology, and ecclesiology), moral theology (with its specializations into general and special, personal and social), church history, and biblical studies was entirely foreign. Much of what was called theology at that time would today be called biblical theology and/or biblical spirituality, that is, it was exegetically based interpretation of Scripture for the purpose of understanding the faith and living the Christian life. (Schneiders 1986:260)

A holistic biblical spirituality therefore involves two-way traffic between theology and spirituality.

Since the Enlightenment, a further divorce has occurred between exegesis and theology, as the way the Bible was read was changed to conform to the modern spirit. Critical studies in the 19th century saw the Bible as only a book because of the prevailing secular view of reality. Theology was seen as no different from any other branch of learning. This led to a decline in spirituality, especially a biblical spirituality, in some academic circles.

The Enlightenment idea of religious neutrality in theology has unfortunately resulted in the academic study of religious concepts with no connection to church or life in society as a whole. The Enlightenment emphasized reason and critique rather than worship, prayer, devotion to God, a spiritually based morality, the church as community, the Holy Spirit and miracles, conversion and new life in Christ. This was true of society as a whole and, to some extent, of certain theologies and interpretations of the Bible; a very different approach to earlier approaches.

Most of the great theologians of the Christian faith prior to the eighteenth century were themselves concerned for spirituality. Athanasius (c.296–373), Augustine of Hippo (354–430), Anselm of Canterbury (c.1033–1109), Thomas Aquinas (c.1225–74), Martin Luther (1483–1546), and Roberto Bellarmine (1542–1621) – to name but a few examples – were theologians who saw no tension between the intellectual exploration of the Christian faith and its practical outworking in spirituality, preaching, ministry, and pastoral care. (McGrath 1999:27)

During the 19th century, the new field of historical criticism stressed that the social context and literary development of the biblical text ought to be taken seriously in its interpretation. During this period and in the 20th century, the Bible's multiple authorship, the dates of authorship, its many oral and literary sources, its literary context and genre were closely investigated. Scholars highlighted the transmission of the Bible, canonization, its ancient manuscripts and translation. Awareness of the social, theological and literary factors that played a role in its writing and interpretation were stressed as never before. Finally, the theological, social and ideological elements that influenced the readers who variously interpreted the biblical text were emphasized.

Many of these factors are discussed in this dissertation. For example, in chapter four, key elements such as the context, authorship and teaching of the book of the Acts of the Apostles are discussed. In this chapter, and also in chapters five and six, the “rediscovery” of the importance of Jesus’ teaching on the Kingdom of God is discussed.

The contribution of scholars from many fields has been invaluable in the study of the Bible, Christian spirituality and the elucidation and development of evangelical and charismatic theology. However, from an evangelical and charismatic perspective, elements of this biblical debate had a negative impact, especially criticism by some scholars of the inspiration and authority of the Bible and neglect by some of the content of the Bible and its application to personal, church and social life. Contemporary churches and especially evangelicals and charismatics need to be aware of these developments, and the varying views among evangelicals themselves on issues of the authority, inspiration, inerrancy and infallibility of the Scriptures in their attempt to construct and live out a biblical spirituality.

A liberal interpretation argues that the Bible was written by people who were not necessarily inspired by God whose historical views and prejudices are reflected in the text. Fundamentalists stress the importance of inerrancy (the biblical text as originally given cannot be wrong) and the literal interpretation of the Bible. Evangelical scholars place themselves in between the liberal and fundamentalist approaches although they are not a monolithic group. (Forster 2009:139)

An evangelical approach to the authority of the Scriptures involves the following principles, as noted by Lloyd-Jones (1973:30-50):

- Evangelical Christians believe that the Scriptures have authority because they are inspired by God himself.
- The whole Bible is the word of God, and when we speak of the authority of Scripture we mean “that property by which it demands faith and obedience to all its declarations”. The biblical doctrine of Scripture implies that the Bible itself claims that authority and we must submit to it.
- The question of the authority of the Scriptures is ultimately a matter of faith and not of argument. No one can truly believe in and submit to the authority of the Scriptures except as a result of the *testimonium Spiritus internum*. It is only as a result of the work, and the illumination, of the Holy Spirit within us that we can have this assurance about the authority of the Scriptures.
- People understand the living word as they encounter the proclaimed and written word of God.
- The authority of the Scriptures carries with it an obligation to be obeyed, not only an assumption to be affirmed.

The Scriptures should, however, never harden into a set of abstract propositions divorced from historical realities and a “spiritual life”. The challenge of living out a biblical spirituality today involves a commitment to apply the meaning of the text alongside awareness that “the indwelling of God grounds the recovery of a fruitful relationship between ethics and spirituality” (Sheldrake 1998:57).

As mentioned earlier, perceptions of the Bible and the way in which the Bible is interpreted differ. We turn to these issues now.

3.2 Christian spirituality and the Bible

Central to the development of a biblical spirituality is the matter of how the Bible is perceived. A number of issues are important for discussion here. One is the different views Christians have of the inspiration and authority of the Bible, for example the difference between the views of liberals and evangelicals. Fundamentalists, in turn, use the term inerrancy. Alongside this we must also constantly bear in mind that evangelicals stand in the stream of historical orthodoxy, and are committed to the binding authority of the Scriptures as the controlling norm in the hermeneutical process:

Evangelical Christians are therefore anxious to avoid the opposite extremes of fundamentalism and liberalism. While fundamentalists declare that the Bible is the word of God, they tend to regard the human authors as having been entirely passive, their human faculties having been suspended by divine inspiration. They sometimes liken the Bible’s human authors to musical instruments or dictating machines, no longer persons but lifeless toys in the hands of the Spirit. So-called “liberals”, by contrast, declare that the Bible is the word of human beings, originating in their minds and enabled by only occasional flashes of divine inspiration. (Stott 1999:46)

As noted, evangelicals have benefited from the work of many scholars in the field of biblical studies, hence their understanding of how the Bible came to be written and transmitted has widened. They generally do not subscribe to the “mechanical” views of some fundamentalists, as described above by Stott. However, they remain convinced that the Bible is not like any other book. Their studies of it and their experience of the living Christ, often through its very pages, have assured them that it is divinely inspired.

In addition to the issue of the origin and inspiration of the Bible, there are the other key issues of interpretation and application. Evangelicals stress that the Bible is an authoritative guide to faith and life; that its teachings and moral principles need to be obeyed and lived out in practical realities – both personal and social.

Contemporary evangelicals do not want to make the mistake of allegorizing or dismissing historical research, but their greatest interest is the “experience of God” that must flow from the text, thus allowing the text to read you, as you read the text. This is how 21st century biblical spirituality uses the Bible without being pre-critical, and is most interested in application. Accepting the text, we now have to ask: How can we apply it? Packer (1995:1993) puts it more comprehensively:

As an activity, theology is a cat’s cradle of interrelated though distinct disciplines: elucidating texts (exegesis), synthesizing what they say on the things they deal with (biblical theology), seeing how the faith was stated in the past (historical theology), formulating it for today (systematic theology), finding its implications for conduct (ethics), commending and defending it as truth and wisdom (apologetics), defining the Christian task in the world (missiology), stockpiling resources for life in Christ (spirituality), corporate worship (liturgy), and exploring ministry (practical theology).

Even among evangelicals (e.g. conservative and radical), the way in which the Bible is to be interpreted and applied may differ, especially with reference to complex social issues, such as poverty, culture and leadership. Those whose politics are more conservative are less interested in social transformation and addressing problems of inequality and poverty. In the apartheid era, many white evangelicals were politically moderate or conservative, while many blacks were more radical. These factors affect the understanding that different groups of evangelicals will have of biblical spirituality. Some will see the Bible as having social content and will therefore link activism and contemplation; others will have a privatized spirituality.

Therefore the interpretation and application of the Bible, even by evangelicals, “will differ dramatically depending on whether one is a fundamentalist or a radical Evangelical or somewhere in between. Divisions are also based on theological position, which is largely based on educational background and social location which may dictate a more or less politically conscious theological approach” (Boshoff 2005:73). This means that social context and theological position influence interpretation. Interpreters must be aware that understandings of the gospel are not value free. Ideological influences stemming from our social grouping and culture have

an impact on how we understand the Bible. But it also becomes evident that purely rationalistic and secular readings of the biblical text are out of step with the hermeneutics of evangelical Christians over the centuries. Modern evangelicals need to engage again with matters of biblical context, authorship and textual analysis, while taking our own context into account and noting the ideological assumptions and interests of interpreters. The experience of South Africans has influenced the development of a more holistic evangelical approach. These issues will be dealt with in chapters five and six. These points are important for the practice of a truly biblical spirituality, especially by those who claim to take the Bible seriously.

How to read and understand the text therefore becomes very important for evangelical spirituality, as our main concern is with the final text (canonical in the life of the church) and how it affects our experience of God, i.e. the application, ethics and lifestyle that flow from the text.

Let me give an example. A Christian is in a time of personal difficulty. He or she reads Isaiah 45:2–3:

“I will go before you and level the exalted places,
I will break in pieces the doors of bronze
and cut through the bars of iron,
I will give you the treasures of darkness
and the hoards in secret places,
that you may know that it is I, the Lord,
the God of Israel, who call you by your name.”

This text speaks powerfully into his/her situation and he/she finds peace and courage amidst his/her difficulty. What is happening here? The original context has to do with the nation of Israel being brought back from captivity in Babylon. Is the Christian misapplying the text? No, I do not think so. What is happening is a highly compressed procedure which has at least four stages:

1. The Hebrew text has been translated for me, the reader.
2. The text is saying that God will rescue Israel from Babylon.
3. There is a principle here: God rescues his people from times of bondage, exile and difficulty.
4. The principle also applies to me: God will rescue me from my time of bondage and difficulty.

In a matter of a few seconds, the Christian Bible reader has gone through four procedures of translation (with help from someone else): exegesis, discovery of

biblical truth and the application of truth to him-/herself. This is not “simple Bible reading”; it is highly sophisticated Bible reading.¹

Exegesis and hermeneutics, properly utilized, are themselves spiritual acts depending on the leading of the Holy Spirit, thus allowing the text to read you, as you read the text under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Evangelicals do not find their models of interpretation in the “critical” commentaries of the last century and a half, which stop short at offering historical explanations of the text and have no applicatory angle at all; they find them, rather, in the from-faith-to-faith expository styles of older writers who concerned themselves with what Scripture means as God’s word to their own readers, as well as with what it meant as religious instruction for the readership originally addressed, and whose supreme skill lay in making appropriate applications of the material that they exegete by grammatico-historical means. (Packer 1999:157)

This historical-grammatical method is a hermeneutical technique that seeks to uncover the original meaning of the text by taking into account the actual words, the syntactical aspects, the cultural and historical background, and the literary genre. But to stop at the original meaning is not enough. Evangelicals go on to ask: How is the text relevant to my situation and my spirituality? Osborne, in his excellent introduction to biblical interpretation, notes that hermeneutics operates on three levels:

We begin with the third person approach, asking “what it meant” (exegesis), then passing to the first person approach, querying “what it meant for me” (devotional) and finally taking a second person approach, seeking “how to share with you what it meant to me” (sermonic). These levels are interdependent rather than exclusive. Existential hermeneutics has always centered upon the second or third, with some arguing that the first no longer has relevance for today. In actuality all three are essential to a holistic methodology. (1991:6)

Hermeneutics for the evangelical or charismatic biblical scholar therefore involves perceiving Scripture as divine revelation, and seeking to apply the plain sense of Scripture to our lives through an interpretive process involving exegesis. Such a process ensures that the word of God, inspired by and understood with the help of the Holy Spirit, is relevant and applicable for people in every setting and epoch. This is the approach I am advocating, although a postmodern critique of this view would argue that there is no general “plain sense” of Scripture, as all readers see the text from their own perspective. This is discussed in the next section.

¹Developed from example taken from G Fee, 1996, History as context for interpretation, in *The act of Bible reading*, edited by E Dyck, Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 10-32 (esp. p. 11).

3.2.1 Contemporary evangelicals and charismatics and biblical spirituality

Postmodern hermeneutics as a new approach reminds us that interpreters see things from their own perspective and that social location plays a key role in biblical interpretation. Carson (2005:98-101), an evangelical, notes five correlatives of postmodernism that have presented a significant challenge to a quest for a biblical spirituality. These are:

1. *Syncretism*, where elements of fundamentally disparate religions are chosen to construct a syncretistic concoction.
2. *Secularization*, where religion is not abolished, but pushed to the periphery of life, and the truth claims of religion are regarded as no more than personal or communal choices, not the truth of God.
3. *Biblical illiteracy* encourages the rapid spread of postmodern relativism, and the blurring of the absolute claims of the Bible regarding God, salvation, and right and wrong.
4. *Ill-defined spirituality*, shaped by various New Age religions, supports a postmodern outlook, which creates confusion.
5. *Globalization*, with the growing awareness of cultural diversity, in turn vindicates postmodern theory.

Postmodernism thus challenges a biblical spirituality in its desire to deconstruct all texts and all acts of interpretation.

Where does this leave the evangelical and charismatic church as we work out our faith in a postmodern epoch? The path to a rediscovery of evangelical and biblical spirituality involves a process of correlating faith and life and a fusion of horizons, a theme characteristic of the noted German philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer (1900–) in relation to textual interpretation and application.

Gadamer argues that there is a need to allow the “horizon” of the text, and the “horizon” of the individual’s situation to be correlated. In the same manner there is a need for the “horizon” of the individual’s world of experience to be brought into relation with the themes of Christian theology. (McGrath 1999:9)

Further insights complementary to those of Gadamer have been developed by the natural scientist Michael Polanyi. For Polanyi, a “fiduciary framework – a framework of belief, of faith, of commitment is a necessary precondition of knowledge” (McGrath 1987:53). Polanyi affirms the “fiduciary rootedness” of all reality in the face of the Enlightenment misrepresentation of the situation. Therefore, as we seek to understand the text and apply it, we are aware that the very process of radical application will in turn throw light back onto the text, completing the circle of praxis.

We can never see things exactly as Paul saw them; the fusion of understandings is never perfect. Even those who accept the authority of the Bible do come up with different interpretations of the text! But experience shows that it is possible to get much closer to Paul's thinking by repeated re-reading, by cycles of "distanciation" (distancing oneself from twenty-first century beliefs) and "fusion of horizons" (to learn from the historical setting of the author), than would be the case if there were no effort along such lines. (Carson 2005:117)

It is precisely because the evangelical and charismatic church in South Africa has often failed to radically and consistently understand, interpret and apply the biblical text, that the authenticity of the text itself as normative for our spirituality has been doubted, i.e. a holistic Christian spirituality anchored in the Bible. The central focus of a biblical spirituality therefore is not simply on analysis of the text using various hermeneutical approaches, but on the application and functionality of the text, i.e. how to read, interpret and apply the Bible in South Africa today.

3.3 A critical reflection on experience

As mentioned in chapter one, my own experience as a pastor in the South African context and the lessons I learnt emerged out of an interaction of the reading of the biblical text, secondary writings (evangelical and others) and our actions as a church community. This interaction became a dynamic process which helped to challenge my own experience and that of other evangelical churches in several of the suburbs and the townships of South Africa. The Bible deeply influenced the actions of our Christian community. Our actions and experience, in turn, caused us to rethink our understanding of the Scriptures and the gospel. It was this theological reflection on our experience that profoundly shaped our spirituality in a changing South Africa.

For example, in the 1980s and early 1990s, our church in South Africa had strong links with other charismatics from the United Kingdom (part of the New Frontiers group), who came from strong reformed theological backgrounds and a more conservative position on the socio-political implications of the gospel. Our process of reflection and experience in South Africa during this period caused us to realize that it was possible to be exposed to narrow or reductionist versions of the gospel from abroad without seeking the establishment of a truly holistic, biblical approach of the gospel locally. (As mentioned previously, white South African evangelicals were often rooted elsewhere intellectually and culturally.) This process occurred even though both groups took the Bible seriously. We came to realize that the gospel of the

Kingdom embraced personal and societal dimensions involving previously neglected areas, such as concern for the poor, reflecting the multicultural demographics of South African society in our church community, and public protest against societal injustice. We saw that, in these areas, we were not practising a biblical spirituality. We needed to repent and expose ourselves more radically to the word of God. The changes wrought in the local South African churches as a result of this dynamic process had a profound and positive effect on the overseas Christians and leaders within our church group. It resulted in a far greater involvement with the poor and issues of justice among many of the New Frontiers churches internationally.

Similarly, my engagement with the Scriptures following my national service in the South African Defence Force (SADF) brought a realization of the heresy of apartheid. I was convicted of the need to respond prophetically by exercising a pastoral calling in the townships of the Western Cape. I saw a profound ambiguity between the teaching of Scripture regarding God's acceptance of all peoples and the apartheid philosophy inherent in the SADF. Understanding and interpreting the Bible in this way became a crucial source for my own Christian spirituality and the transformation it wrought.

Although the evangelical and charismatic churches in South Africa say they uphold an evangelical interpretation and application of the Bible, a biblical spirituality is not, in fact, always practised. This results largely from how the Bible is interpreted and applied as a source of Christian spirituality. For example, the conservative theological framework claims that the Bible and politics do not mix, while in practice it supports the political status quo. This will be explored more fully in chapters five and six.

In developing a biblical spirituality for 21st century South Africa, it is important to draw on:

- The global history of evangelicalism and the charismatic movement in order to identify their impact on South African evangelical and charismatic churches.
- Current evangelical and charismatic writings and experiences from within South Africa.
- The Bible itself, noting a variety of interpretations.
- The insights of earlier writers in church history.
- A range of theological writings concerning spirituality, the Bible and evangelicals/charismatics.

- Writings that deal with historical influences and current challenges in Africa.
- My own pastoral experience in these traditions.

In the next chapter I will discuss the historical process that gave us the book of Acts, as well as the place of Acts 6 in the story of Acts, and what was unfolding in the life and spirituality of the early church. I will discuss the spirituality of the early church alongside the biblical, cultural and geographic context of Acts 6. I will explain the situation that arose historically in Acts 6:1–7 and exegete and interpret the text. I will use as sources the Old and New Testament, especially the book of Acts. As it will not be possible to concentrate on the whole book of Acts, Acts 6:1–7 will be used as a clear example of the spirituality of the early church.

Finally, an analysis of Acts 6 in the unfolding drama of the entire book of Acts will help us to understand what was developing in the early church, and how the apostles balanced ethical issues (material privilege, ethnicity and leadership) with the needs of the people, alongside prayer, preaching and gospel evangelism. The intention is to discover how the apostles worked out a biblical spirituality in the local communities of the early church. In subsequent chapters, I will endeavour to elucidate how the experience of Acts 6 can inform and be applied to the evangelical church today.

Chapter four: The spirituality of the New Testament church

In this chapter I will focus on the book of Acts as an expression of the spirituality of the New Testament church. This includes descriptions of the spiritual life of the early church and the ministry of the first-generation apostles, who were foundational for the church (Acts 2:41–42). The Acts of the Apostles has been highly instructive historically in helping to shape the church on the basis of New Testament biblical values. In my own experience, Acts has proved to be an indispensable guide to personal instruction and for church and leadership formation. This does not mean that the other New Testament writings are unimportant. I draw below on several other New Testament texts. But this dissertation focuses on the importance of Acts 6.

History is an indispensable aid in the study of Christian spirituality, as the present is usually the product of the past, our spiritual ancestry, and the seed of future possibilities. An analysis of the spirituality of the New Testament church, as found especially in the book of Acts, is critical in helping to shape a truly biblical spirituality for today. It is an excellent source for understanding the spiritual life of the early church:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42–47)

In Acts 5:16 we read: “The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.” Here we have a picture of early Christian spirituality as it impacted the personal lives of believers as well as the surrounding society, maintaining the unity between theology and prayer, faith and life.

The first disciples began to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and Messiah. Freed from seeking to obtain righteousness through observance of the Mosaic Law (Romans 3:21–26; Galatians 3:23–27), they began to proclaim the gospel of salvation in Christ

to both Jews and Gentiles. Those who believed in Christ experienced new birth, were baptised in the community of believers, later called Christians, nourished by sharing in the Lord's supper and lived a "life of universal love that bore witness to life in the Spirit and attracted others to faith" (McGinn, Meyendorff and Leclercq 1985:2). The followers of Jesus Christ spread the gospel from its beginnings in Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

4.1 The context in Israel and the Roman Empire 4 BC – 64 AD

Early Christian spirituality evolved and found expression in the cultural context of Greco-Roman civilization and the unified political environment of the Roman Empire. "The Christian church was born in the Roman Empire. This great and powerful Commonwealth stretched from England to Persia and from the Sahara to north western Germany" (Boer 1976:1). This Commonwealth had come at a brutal price:

As Rome's empire grew larger, the methods of conquest became harsher and more ruthless. For example after the sack of the cities of Epirus, in north-west Greece in 167 BC 150,000 people were enslaved. 20 years later, when Corinth was raised to the ground, its male population was slaughtered and the women and children enslaved. (Tingay and Badcock 1989:59)

The people conquered by Rome were taxed and their riches absorbed into the Roman Empire. Gonzales notes a number of other factors about the Greco-Roman world:

The Roman Empire had brought to the Mediterranean basin an unprecedented political unity which enabled early Christians to travel without fear. Roman law and Hellenistic culture (through the conquest of Alexander between 334 and 326 B.C.) was the context in which the early church took shape and provided avenues for the proclamation of the gospel. Syncretism was the fashion of the time and to the Roman pantheon were added numerous gods from different lands. (1984:13)

Certain factors were very advantageous for the spread of the gospel:

- The Mediterranean world was enjoying a period of relative political peace and stability.
- The Greek and Latin languages were widely spoken.
- The Romans had developed an excellent road and postal system.
- The world was in a state of flux, and very religious (Acts 17:22). Many were searching for God, looking for a faith worth following.
- Since the return from Babylonian captivity in 538 BC, the establishment of Jewish communities and synagogues in various places formed a natural network for the spread of gospel.

Ironically, the Roman conquest also had a profound effect on traditional religious thinking:

Citizens had trusted in the gods of their city or state, but the deities had repeatedly failed to protect them from their enemies. In the realignment of ideas, men sought for a religion that was more personal, more eclectic, and more ecstatic, instead of a religion that represented national identity. (Gaebelien 1979:494)

The social context of the book of Acts was the powerful Roman Empire that had become a world power and had an estimated population of 50 to 80 million. "About 2½ million people inhabited Judea, and there were about 5,000,000 Jews altogether in the Empire, 10% of the whole population" (Bock 2007:43). Judaism was tolerated as an acceptable religion, as long as they did not challenge the state or the emperor. Since Judaism was a minority religion, the earliest form of Christianity was seen as even less significant. Israel itself, between the Testaments and prior to the birth of Jesus, was spiritually dry: "The zeal which had salutarily preserved the law through days of grim exile and disaster had turned cancerous and was multiplying its activity without meaning" (Blaklock 1963:35). Judaism during the intertestamental times became a religion of the Torah, alongside the importance of the synagogue. "Because of the persecutions suffered, there was a rise of the messianic expectation as seen in the increase of apocalyptic literature. God would raise up the messianic leader or leaders to deliver them from the foreign oppressors and set up the promised messianic kingdom" (Gaebelien 1979:192).

As we see in the gospels, a number of movements within Judaism made up the social context of the New Testament church:

- The Sadducees were an upper-class movement that accepted only the Pentateuch and denied the resurrection. Many chief priests were Sadducees. They dominated the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin.
- The Pharisees were legalists and traditionalists, who often put ritualistic observance before love and mercy.
- The scribes (lawyers) belonged to the Pharisee party. They taught and administered the law.
- The Herodians were influential Jews who favoured Roman rule.
- The zealots were Jewish freedom fighters who wanted to throw off Roman rule. Their actions eventually sparked the great rebellion which led to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.
- The Essenes had withdrawn from society into strict monastic discipline and study of the Scriptures.

The world of the New Testament was characterized by Roman power, Greek learning and language, and Jewish religion.

4.2 The authorship, date and content of the book of Acts

The early church had as their sources of inspiration the Jewish Bible, the oral sayings of Jesus, the teachings of the apostles and, later, the letters of Luke, Paul and other writers. The teaching of the apostles and the epistles of Paul, and later Peter and others, were foundational for the newly planted churches of the Graeco-Roman world, and greatly helped to foster an authentic biblical spirituality (Acts 1:1–2). These apostles and prophets were a unique one-generation group of men and women who were eyewitnesses of the resurrection and channels of revelation for the first generation of the church (Ephesians 3:1–5). As the church expanded, it became important to have a clear written record of the basics, particularly the life and teaching of Jesus.

Acts is written by Paul's companion, Luke the physician, as a sequel to the third Gospel. The Acts related are mainly those of the apostles Peter and Paul, though the book might well be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit, for it is under the direction of the Holy Spirit that the new church breaks through the national frontiers of Israel to become an international, worldwide movement. The book of Acts is the story of how the early church began to make an impact on the much larger Roman world. The early church was largely an urban movement that won people of the Roman cities to Christ. "It seems to have been Paul's deliberate policy to move purposefully from one strategic city-centre to the next. What drew him to the cities was probably that they contained the Jewish synagogues, the larger populations and the influential leaders" (Stott 1990:293). As noted earlier, the Roman Empire, at the time of the Acts of the Apostles, was a power which created an opportunity for the quick spread of the gospel. "For brief years she policed the world without enmity towards the Church, and the Church used those years well. The Acts of the Apostles is part of that record" (Blaklock 1963:27).

There is nothing in Acts that indicates that the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and temple in 70 AD had taken place before the time of writing. "But there was another event which took place a few years previously which we should have expected to be reflected fairly clearly in an apologetic document written not long

afterwards. That was the persecution of the Christians of Rome which followed the great fire of A.D. 64” (Bruce 1981:22). Bruce continues: “If we can date Luke’s *History* a little earlier than the persecution of 64, we find a reasonable life-setting for the work.”

New Testament scholar Donald Guthrie (1970:340) proposes the following arguments for a date before 64 AD. A summary includes:

- The absence of reference to important events which happened between 60 and 70 AD.
- The absence of reference to the death of Paul.
- The primitive character of the subject matter. It is significant that the major interests of the author of the book of Acts are those relevant in the earliest period of church history, which were not as relevant in later times.
- The primitive nature of the theology. Either the author writes early enough to be in direct, living touch with actual eyewitnesses, or he possesses such remarkable historical skill that he is able to reproduce with clear fidelity the primitive climate of thought.
- The impartial attitude of the state towards the church.
- The lack of relationship of Acts to the Pauline epistles.

Internal evidence supporting Luke as the author involves an analysis of style and language. The evidence of archaeology and epigraphy points to an author personally familiar with the world of the 1st century. External evidence for Luke's authorship of Acts is substantiated by “the oldest extant list of New Testament writings, known from the name of its discoverer as the Muratorian fragment, and dating from the latter half of the second century, which lists the third gospel and the Acts of the Apostles as the work of Luke the physician” (Blaklock 1963:13).

In geographic terms, the book of Acts spans the region from Jerusalem, where the followers of Christ first received the Holy Spirit and began preaching in the name of Jesus, to Rome, the political centre of the empire. At the time of the birth of Jesus, Rome was about 750 years old. Acts provides the basic history of the spread of Christianity in the 30 years following the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and is a link between the Gospels and the epistles. “In sum, Acts is a piece of Hellenist and Jewish historiography that treats the theme of how the new community is rooted in God's old promises, the Lord Jesus’ current activity, and the Spirit’s effective presence” (Bock 2007:12). Acts is an historical narrative written by Luke for Theophilus, a high-born Christian wanting to know more about the origins of the church. As many distorted reports about Christianity were circulating, Luke undertook

to provide a trustworthy account from sources in the Jerusalem community, as well as Hellenistic Jewish communities. The Gospel of Luke was volume one, devoted to the life and ministry of Jesus; Acts was volume two. The preaching of the gospel radiated out in many directions from its Palestinian homeland, along the roads leading from Jerusalem to Rome.

Luke's audience were both Jews and Gentiles. He was at pains to show how Christianity was perceived in the ancient world, and therefore constantly legitimizes the claims of the new movement by rooting Christianity in God's ancient promises (see Acts 2 and the coming of the Spirit; Acts 3:24 predicted by the prophets). God's promises to Israel were now being realized through Christ and his church. This new community arising out of Judaism began to develop a separate identity in their approach to the Mosaic Law, circumcision and new-found freedom in Christ. The rejection of the gospel by the majority of Jews, the influx of Gentile believers, and the resultant persecution caused the early church to develop a distinct identity and character.

Luke's purpose for writing is therefore:

- To present a history. The book of Acts provides a coordinated account of the beginnings of the church.
- To give a Christian defence to both Jews (4:8–12) and Gentiles (25:8–11). It shows how the early church responded to Jewish and pagan thought, Roman rule and Hellenistic thought and culture.
- To provide a guide. In Acts, basic principles are applied to specific situations in the context of problems and persecution.
- To depict the triumph of Christianity in the face of persecution. Clearly Christianity was a work of God (Acts 5:35–39).²

The story of Acts needs to be seen as the continuation of God's purposes in history. Although "one big problem with Acts is the difficulty of discovering any sources used by the author" (Marshall 1980:37), Luke shows remarkable accuracy on matters of detailed historical background as he rewrites the story of the early church in his own words. Regarding the historical authenticity of Acts: "A. N. Sherwin-White, who was Reader in ancient history at Oxford University and described himself as 'a professional Greco-Roman historian', strongly affirmed the accuracy of Luke's background knowledge" (Stott 1990:25). According to Bock (2007:20):

²Summary from *New international study Bible*, p. 1642.

In Acts 1 to 12 it appears that our sources are from the Jewish and Hellenistic Jewish community, since Acts 6:8–8:40 seems to be told from the latter perspective, whereas most everything else up to this point has a Jerusalem perspective. The source for Acts 9 could well be Paul, and in Acts 13–28 Paul likely had some impact, but beyond this it is hard to know if Luke worked with local traditions of either an oral or a written nature or the combination of both types.

Bock (2007:10-12) continues:

Luke notes nine elements of the account that have external historical attestation, either through the Pauline Epistles or through outside historical sources. These are Paul's escape from Damascus, Paul's trip to Rome, the earning of Paul's livelihood, Herod Agrippa's sudden death, Galileo as proconsul of Achaia, Felix and Festus as procurators in Judea, Drusilla as wife of Felix, Bernice as wife of Herod Agrippa II, and Ananias as High Priest. He also notes minor details that are correct such as proper descriptions of cities (Philippi as a colony) and officials (politarchs in Thessalonica). Much of what we can test shows that Acts is a credible historical source.

In providing Theophilus with a trustworthy account of the origin of the gospel, Luke demonstrated that the new Christian movement was not a menace to law and order throughout the Roman Empire, but was in fact the true fulfilment of the faith of the patriarchs and prophets. Luke is noted for his historical accuracy and, like other New Testament writers such as Peter, he set his work in the framework of contemporary imperial events. His pages are full of references to provincial governors and client kings. It is in this socio-political context that the early church began.

Luke writes in Acts 1:1–2 about “all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen”. The ascension terminated Jesus' earthly ministry and inaugurated his heavenly ministry. The coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4) would fill the apostles with power in order to be witnesses of the Kingdom of God. The coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost in the city of Jerusalem filled with representatives of the various nations was a powerful demonstration of the multiracial, multinational, multilingual nature of the Kingdom of God. “This personal, powerful, experience of the eschatological Spirit not only transformed them individually, but made them effective in their being the people of the good news in pagan Greco-Roman culture” (Fee1996:ix).

When the New Testament documents were gathered together in the second century,

Acts played a pivotal role, for it provided at one and the same time the sequel to the gospels and the background to the apostolic letters. During the early Christian centuries it circulated in two editions: the “eastern text”, on which most of our translations are based, and the “western text”, which is rather fuller. (Bruce 1982:7)

Bruce explains: “The original text of the New Testament must be recovered as far as possible by a comparison of the various types of text current in the early Christian centuries, as these have been preserved in manuscripts, ancient versions, and in biblical quotations in early Christian writers” (1956:40).

Acts is also a link between the early church and the church in each succeeding age, giving an understanding of the principles that ought to govern the church of any age. As a historical narrative, Acts played a vital role in the early church in recording the spread of the gospel and the mission of Jesus Christ, despite opposition and tension regarding the inclusion of Gentiles among the people of God. Acts also plays a vital role for contemporary Christians by offering a window into the life and organization of the early church under the power of the Holy Spirit. While our context may be different, Acts remains a vital biblical source that needs to be analyzed and reapplied in the church today.

The book of Acts is therefore a faithful account of the beginning of Jesus’ ministry through his church. The entire period between Pentecost and the *Parousia* is to be filled with the extending mission of the church in the power of the Holy Spirit. The mission of the church subsequently moves from Jerusalem (Acts 1–7) to Samaria (Acts 8–11), then as far as Rome (Acts 28).

4.3 Early New Testament spirituality: Characteristics

Some of the major characteristics of early Christian spirituality in this period were:

4.3.1 An understanding of the Kingdom of God

Early Christian spirituality was marked firstly by the fulfilment of the Old Testament hope that the Messiah would come and usher in the Kingdom (reign) of God (Luke 2:25–32). Jesus said that he had come not to abolish the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfil them (Matthew 5–6). According to Luke 16:16: “The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached.” This indicates that a great transition had taken place from promise to

fulfilment. No longer was the Kingdom simply a future hope. It had become a present reality in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and was awaiting the final consummation in the *eschaton*. This had a crucial bearing on the beginning of Christian spirituality, for it provided us with the right key for interpreting history, i.e. the theology of the Kingdom and the subsequent spirituality that flows from it.

Early Christian spirituality was characterized by a response to the good news that the Kingdom had come and had inaugurated a period of divine grace (Luke 4:18–19). Matthew makes this clear when he summarizes Jesus' early ministry in the following way: "And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people" (Matthew 4:23). The coming of Christ (the Messiah) ushers in the Kingdom of God. Jesus' initial call was: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). This response would bring about a new encounter with God in Christ.

While the concept was present in both the Old Testament and inter-testamental Judaism, we can safely affirm that the teaching of the fulfilment of the Kingdom is original to Jesus, specifically in the sense of the Kingdom as the good news of fulfilled hope, that God has come to reign among his people. Christ proclaimed his unique concept of the Kingdom:

Unfortunately the Kingdom has been little understood in church history. It was only in the eighteenth century that discoveries of a mass of literature from the first century B.C. and the first century A.D. began to influence the understanding of the New Testament background. This literature revealed how deeply that period was influenced by eschatology and apocalyptic. (Morphew 1987:1)

4.3.2 Christ's new ethical standards

Another characteristic of early Christian spirituality was the introduction of new ethical standards that upheld, surpassed and transcended the Law as Christians lived out the teachings of Christ in the power of the outpoured Spirit (Romans 10:4; Galatians 5:16–26). The righteousness of the Law was not lost in the Christian, but embraced in something altogether greater. Christians now fulfil or uphold the Law (Romans 3:31) without being "under" the Law. The will of God is now done from the heart (Ephesians 6:6). Allegiance to Christ has surpassed allegiance to the Law.

Luke 16:16 tells us that “the Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached”. Christ's birth, his life and teaching were part of the mighty rule of God that broke in on the earth. This means that Jesus began to teach his disciples the good news of how to live in the Kingdom of God. The Sermon on the Mount and other New Testament texts are addressed to his disciples (Matthew 5:1), and outline in graphic language the kind of life they are to live in the power of the Holy Spirit. In this and other Gospel passages, Jesus commands his disciples to live as the renewed people of God. Michael Eaton (1999:15) notes: “The Law of Moses foreshadowed a higher righteousness, and the sermon is an exposition of the fulfilment of the law rather than an exposition of the shadow. Jesus talked about ‘fulfilling’ the law and this is not precisely the same as maintaining the law.”

This new ethical standard called for by Christ has implications for the formation of moral communities today, as we receive God's love in Christ and love and take responsibility for others. We see this demonstrated in Acts 6 in the feeding of the widows. The early Christians discovered that personal “morality is more than external obedience to the law and the law cannot ensure morality” (Kretzschmar, Bentley and Van Niekerk 2009:19). It was morality rather than spirituality that the Law demanded.

Schneiders (1985:1) notes concerning the first disciples:

They felt themselves to be free of the Mosaic Law (see Galatians 3:23–27), no longer bound to struggle to please God through the performance of good works, but, as graced children of God in Christ, empowered by his indwelling Spirit to live in love of God and one another (see Romans 8) according to the pattern that Jesus had given them during his life and described to them in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1–2).

Now Christians experienced the freedom that Christ died to impart. Not a freedom to disobey the law, but a freedom to do God's will out of gratitude and because of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Christ's life, passion and resurrection were of decisive significance for the conduct of Christians of the first centuries. “Jesus is not only ‘the way’ (how we should live) and ‘the life’ (our spiritual union with God) but also ‘the truth’ (what we should believe)” (Anderson 2000:105). We trust and obey God by believing his gospel word.

4.3.3 A new community of the Spirit

The first Christian believers truly believed that the future had begun through their experience of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. It was God's presence that now distinguished the early believers corporately as God's people, and enabled them to reproduce God's life in their communities. Charisms also showed God's love and power in the Christian community (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12:7–11). Holt states that: "It seems likely that many churches in the first and second centuries practiced a spirituality that encouraged charismatic expression" (1993:28). Early Christian spirituality was, therefore, marked by the celebration of Christ's victory over the powers of evil and death, and underlies the entire concept of the Eucharistic community.

This encounter with God experienced by the early Christians was also uniquely Trinitarian. As noted in chapter one, God's love demonstrated in Christ's substitutionary death and resurrection was not merely an objective historical event. By the presence of the Spirit, God's love became an experienced reality in the hearts of the early Christian believers.

As noted earlier, the Charismatic Movement has drawn heavily on this New Testament record and deeply identified with the experience of the Spirit of God at work among his people. This has included personal and corporate renewal for the purpose of living the Christian life, i.e. a life of gifting and empowering for witness and service, signs and wonders, demonstrations of the Spirit's power in salvation and healing, and a commitment to prayer. As we see below, this New Testament experience of the Holy Spirit included love for neighbour and avoided a spiritualization of the gospel message, unlike that of some modern charismatics.

4.3.4 The foundational role of Scripture

This new community on earth, called the church, began to develop a new body of Christian writings as the early apostles and leaders began to shape the communities through apostolic doctrine and leadership (Acts 2:42–47; 2 Timothy 1:13–14). Early Christian spirituality was later characterized by the emergence of new Scriptures (Gospels and epistles) that incorporated the influence of the Hebrew Scriptures. As McGinn, Meyendorff and Leclercq (1985:3) state: "The Christians continued to regard the Hebrew Scripture as the inspired word of God even after the expulsion of the

Christians from the synagogue.” The proclamation of the gospel was interpreted in terms of the promises given to the ancestors in the Old Testament. Catechesis and the formation of new converts, prayer, baptism, and the Eucharist were interpreted against the backdrop of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Thus early New Testament Christianity contained key characteristics of a biblical spirituality, as discussed in chapter one. These included an encounter with God in the coming of Christ the Messiah, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. This encounter with God resulted in the regeneration of believers through the action of the Holy Spirit. This ‘breaking in of the Kingdom of God’ had a profound effect on the shaping of Christian ethics and the forging of transformed relationships in the community of believers and love for their neighbours. The role of Scripture remained foundational as a guide to life and godliness as early Christian faith was drenched in the traditions of the Old Testament. These characteristics enabled the early church to navigate effectively the approaching challenge of food distribution to widows, and appointing new leaders to facilitate this new development and expansion.

4.4 Acts 6: Problems, solutions and expansion

Acts 6 is an important chapter in the book of Acts as the early church transitioned from being a Jerusalem-based, centred community, to one that would reach the nations of the world. Prior to this pivotal chapter, the events of Acts 1–5 take place in Jerusalem. We read about the birth of the church and the replacement of Judas (1:15–26), the outpouring of the Spirit and the rapid expansion of the church on the day of Pentecost (2:1–13), the communal life of the early church (2:43–47), mounting opposition by the Jewish authorities, and ongoing growth amidst internal setbacks (3:1–5:42). Acts 6 marks the expansion of the church from Jerusalem into the Gentile world on the death of Stephen (Acts 7). It was the developments that took place among the Greek-speaking Jewish Christians (the Hellenists) in Acts 6 and the resultant persecution that forced the Christians out of Jerusalem. Acts 6 therefore foreshadows later movements towards mission among Gentiles. The tensions that arose around the distribution of food to widows and the later ministry of Stephen, decisively contributed towards a change in the entire mission of the early church. Social administration to meet human need was urgently required amidst a changing ethos and ethnicity in the early church, involving attitudes towards Jerusalem, the

Law, the temple, the nations and mission, as well as the radical and all-embracing nature of God's reign ushered in by Jesus.

Acts 6:1–7 is therefore a pivotal account in the life of the early church as the apostles grappled with a number of issues and tensions affecting the prophetic character and witness of the church. Luke does not present an idealized picture of the early church, but openly discusses the early Hebrew-Hellenist tensions that arose. “It describes an important advance in organization, and points to the rift in outlook between the Hellenistic and Hebrew sections of the church. Out of this situation rose Stephen, a vital link in the story as it moves onto the ministry of Paul” (Blaklock 1963:74).

4.5 Acts 6:1–7

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

As the church continued to grow, problems arose and there was a complaint concerning the welfare of the widows whose cause God had promised to defend in the Old Testament (Exodus 22:22; Deuteronomy 10:18; Psalm 146:9; Isaiah 1:17). At this stage of its development, the church was entirely Jewish in its composition. However, there were two groups of Jews:

4.5.1 Grecian Jews

Greek or Hellenist Jews were born in lands other than Palestine. They spoke Greek, and read the Old Testament from the Greek translation called the Septuagint. They were more Grecian than Hebraic in their attitude and outlook. Barnabas is the first Hellenistic Jew mentioned in Acts (4:36). The Hellenists differed from the Hebrews in a number of ways. “The Hellenists believed that the Easter experience had bypassed the Torah and temple. It would be the Spirit rather than the law that would guide the

believer's life. It was this attitude which brought them into conflict with the Jewish authorities" (Bosch 1991:43).

4.5.2 The Hebraic Jews

Native-born Palestinian Jews spoke Aramaic and Hebrew, the languages of Palestine, and preserved Jewish culture and customs. These Hebrews retained an allegiance to the Torah and the temple while finding salvation in Christ. It is important to note that "in years immediately following the first Easter, the early Church's missionary engagement remained confined to Israel, as Jesus' own ministry had been. Jerusalem remained the centre of the new community, the members of which continued to visit the temple regularly" (Bosch 1991:41).

Particular tensions arose over the distribution of food to widows (Acts 6:1). These widows were resident aliens in Jerusalem, without help from family or state. Clearly the distinctions went beyond origin and language to different cultures, namely Hebraic and Hellenistic cultures. Greek-speaking Jewish Christians in the Jerusalem church, who had come from outside Jerusalem, felt their widows were being neglected by the Aramaic-speaking Jewish Christians in the daily provision and financial help. The latter group had custody of the community's assets (Acts 4:31; 37; 5:2). "Luke does not give a motive for this accusation; he is interested in the practical – rather than the political problem, which is the community's ineffective administration of goods that has resulted in unmet needs among its most needy members" (Robinson and Wall 2006:88).

This caused a serious strain in the fellowship as widows formed a considerable proportion of the poorer members of the church. New Testament believers were largely poor. Widows were particularly vulnerable in ancient societies as no pensions or government assistance was available to them. While the number of disciples in Jerusalem was still relatively small, the apostles had managed to cope with the situation (Acts 4:32–37). Now that the number of disciples had increased, the apostles had to devise other means of solving the challenge of food distribution. The apostles were aware that the Law of Moses instructed landowners to leave what the harvesters missed so that the poor, the alien and the widow could glean for their needs (Leviticus 19:9; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19). Ruth and Naomi survived in this fashion in a rural environment (Ruth 2:2). The challenge for the apostles was to apply

these principles in an urban environment in Jerusalem. Commitment to the poor was a pivotal aspect of apostolic and church ministry (see 1 Corinthians 16:1–4; Galatians 2:10).

Members of both Hebraic and Hellenist Jewish groups in Jerusalem became Christians. The Hellenist Jews, who had come from all parts of the Roman Empire to settle in Jerusalem, were far more open to Greek culture and could therefore mix more easily with Gentiles than their Palestinian cousins. These differences became a barrier and a ground for dispute as one group discriminated against the other. The difficulty that arose in Acts 6 was particularly acute as this social injustice towards a minority occurred in the new community of Jesus who, by his death, had abolished such distinctions.

Acts 6 is a pivotal chapter in the history of the early church as we see what the apostles did to solve the problem, and what this meant to the community at large. The twelve apostles were a unique, foundational group chosen by Jesus. As first-generation “apostles of the Lamb”, they were foundational for the universal church. Along with Paul and other leading Christians, they were used by God in a unique way to produce what became the canonical Scriptures. They were with Jesus from the baptism of John until the ascension, which included being witnesses to his resurrection (Acts 1:21–22; 4:33; 5:29–32). The Greek word for apostle means “to send”. An apostle is therefore a “sent one”. Jesus repeatedly referred to himself as one sent from the Father (John 20:21). On the day of Pentecost, 3,000 were added to the Twelve (Acts 2:41). In his volume on Ephesians 4, Martyn Lloyd-Jones argues that these foundational apostles must have:

1. Seen the risen Lord.
2. Been called and commissioned to do his work by the risen Lord himself.
3. Been given supernatural revelation of the truth.
4. Been given power to speak not only with authority but also with infallibility.
5. Been given power to work miracles.

There are also subsequent apostles according to Scripture.³

³They are apostles of the ascension (Ephesians 4:7–11), who are not of the same status as the original Twelve, but plant and encourage churches, raise leaders and carry the gospel into new regions. Thus a differentiation is made between the foundational apostles such as Paul and other Christians from the early church until now with the gift and ministry of apostle, even if they did not always have this title.

The apostles resolved the problem as they worked with the people to choose seven men to administer the food distribution and satisfy the needs of the widows. The problem was resolved as both parties took responsibility for it. “The way the problem is eventually solved indicates that it may well have surfaced not because of ethnic malice but because of the lack of administrative organisation caused by the new community's growth across diverse ethnic lines” (Bock 2007:258).

The group of seven Hellenist “deacons” (servants), chosen after consultation with the community, were of Greek origin. From their names, it appears that those chosen were Greek Jews, underlining the sensitivity the early Christian community showed in meeting the needs of a specific cultural group. This helped them to identify with the problem that had arisen in the Grecian community. The men qualified by virtue of honest report, and being full of the Spirit and wisdom. The apostles continued to preach the gospel and care for the poor. The seven are never actually called deacons, but may be seen as a separate form of leadership, appointed to meet a special need.

As a result of these developments, a new structure for community care emerged. The origin of practical administration in the church can be found here. The proposal pleased the whole group and upheld a balanced spirituality, not separating Christianity into different spheres, the spiritual and the physical. The seven appointed to work in the community also engaged those outside the church, combining the edification of believers with evangelism. The apostles provided a solution which met the practical needs of the people while upholding the spiritual disciplines of prayer and study of the word of God. The apostles remained focused in a situation of conflict and gave leadership and responsibility to the people who were most affected by the problem.

I will now give a more detailed interpretation and application of Acts 6:1–7, and discuss the practical challenges of poverty, culture and leadership.

4.6 Practical challenges

4.6.1 The challenge of poverty

There is a clear continuity between the Old Testament ethic and concern for the poor and for justice (Deuteronomy 10:17–18; Proverbs 14:21), the teaching and practice

of Jesus (Luke 4:18–19; 12:33–34), and the apostolic period (Acts 4:32–37). The power of the Holy Spirit given at Pentecost enabled the Christian community to practise what Jesus taught and lived. The ethic of Jesus which permeated the early church was governed by a radical commitment to God and his rule.

This meant that, in the New Testament church, you could not exercise your faith as an isolated individual. Loving God also meant loving and serving people. Life was viewed from a transcendent, eschatological perspective. Acts 2:42 states: “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” New Testament scholar RH Finger (2007:53) notes: “The *κοινωνία* is the spirit of communion, which is expressed in commensality. This breaking of bread goes beyond a liturgical ritual to a common meal, which is a form of assistance to the poor.” This is how Luke could also insist in Acts 4:34: “There was not a needy person among them.” The book of Acts repeatedly demonstrates how the early apostles upheld a fundamental principle of social action flowing from a solid theological foundation in the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is interesting to see the connection between the growth of the New Testament apostolic movement and the deliberate concern for the poor, for example:

- Acts 2:44–45: “And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.”
- Acts 4:32–34: “No one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.”
- Acts 4:36–37: Joseph (Barnabas), the first man to be entrusted with external apostolic responsibility by the apostles in Jerusalem, “sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet”.
- Acts 11:27–30: In Antioch, the response to Agabus’ prophetic warning regarding famine in the entire Roman world was to “send relief to the brothers living in Judea” with Paul and Barnabas.

The early church maintained a strong connection between practical spiritual application and their theology (Acts 6:3–4). This taught them new lessons in working cross-culturally, and eventually led to rapid church growth. Finger (2007:141) says: “The community in Jerusalem did survive in spite of the famine in the forties and in

spite of the growing societal gap between rich and poor. This may very well be attributed to their community of goods, their ‘generalized reciprocity’ as a fictive kin group.”

We see later in Galatians 2:1–10, when the apostle Paul went up to Jerusalem to discuss the nature of apostolic ministry and the grace God had given him to preach to the Gentile world, that the concern for the poor in general was central to his apostolic ministry. In Galatians 2:10 the emphasis seems to be on the poor in the community of believers, but in Galatians 6:10 we are told: “Let us do good to everyone,” which broadens our responsibility beyond the church in bringing relief to the poor. The church at Ephesus also seemed to have a list of widows supported by the church as a demonstration of their practical spirituality (1 Timothy 5:9–16). From the perspective of the New Testament, the gospel of the Kingdom is, by definition, good news to the poor.

A biblical concern for the poor is an area of church life and leadership that needs to be recovered by the church today and applied in local communities as was done in Acts 6. Although the context may be different today, the need to tackle poverty remains as the gap between the rich and the poor widens globally. Hughes (1998: ix) notes:

Accordingly, the acid test of commitment to the Kingdom is practical concern for the poor. Experience shows, however, that far more than goodwill is necessary to change the situation of the poor. If poverty were simply an economic problem, money would be the way to solve it. But poverty is not only material. It is also cultural and social, political and structural.

We now turn to the challenge of culture.

4.6.2 The challenge of culture

Alongside the challenge of poverty and food distribution was the matter of cultural tension. It is important to note: “Culture is not in and of itself either an enemy or a friend to God or humans. It is, rather, something that is there to be used by personal beings such as humans, God, and Satan. The human psyche is structured by culture, as is every expression of groupness, including family, community, and Church” (Kraft 1979:113).

The church was bicultural, Hebrews and Hellenists, but only one of the groups, the Hebrews, were providing the top leadership. As for the Hellenistic widows, they had left their cultural kin group to re-create a new one with fellow believers. “The reconstitution of the fictive kin group meant physical as well as spiritual survival, since without it the lack of relationships and connections doomed first-century Mediterraneans to destitution and starvation” (Finger 2007:277).

The handling of this situation is instructive, for it was the innovative Hellenistic minority group in the Jerusalem church that took the lead in a new and massive advance of large-scale evangelization of the Gentiles. (Acts 11:19–20). The seeds of this advance can be seen clearly in the nature of Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin (the council in Jerusalem that functioned as the central judicial authority for Jews) in Acts 7. In Stephen's landmark speech (and the longest recorded in the book of Acts), he prepared the way for the gospel to move beyond the Jewish sphere to the Samaritans and the Gentiles. Stephen chose to speak about three of the outstanding heroes of the Jewish faith: Abraham, Joseph and Moses. Stephen's speech implied that God spoke to each of them outside the holy land and the temple, emphasizing the fact that the gospel was for all people, not just the Jews (see Acts 7:48–50). Stephen's speech was clearly understood by the Sanhedrin to mean freedom from the Law, and freedom from the temple, and that Jesus, the crucified Messiah, had come to replace the temple and fulfill the Law (Acts 6:13–14).

Stephen's subsequent death had widespread implications for the New Testament church. It sparked the outbreak of persecution, the scattering of Christians and consequent spread of evangelism across cultural lines.

Stephen's death was a signal for the outbreak of a general persecution of the Christian community at Jerusalem, and the great majority of the disciples fled from the city, scattering throughout Judea and Samaria. Contrary to the expectation of the Jewish persecutors, however, so far from suppressing the new religion, this scattering resulted only in the wider spread of the gospel. (Metzger 1965:190)

Stephen's teaching appears to be the first in the early church to make a clear distinction between Judaism and Christianity. The death of Stephen in Acts 7, as the first martyr of the church in 36 AD, saw a deepening division between traditional Jews and new Christians, and turned the early church into a missionary movement. It

was this group of early Christian Hellenists that took the first revolutionary step of evangelizing Gentiles.

As the church expanded from Jerusalem to Antioch, and Gentiles responded to the gospel, the Jerusalem apostles continued to grapple with the challenge of culture and the unfolding Gentile mission. The apostle Peter, even after receiving the Great Commission and the day of Pentecost still had great difficulty entering the house of the Gentile (Acts 10). The apostle Paul had to oppose Peter in Galatians 2:11–16, because Peter had separated himself from Gentile believers for fear of the Judaizers, who encouraged Jewish Christians to eat separately and follow kosher dietary laws. Later in Acts 15 this matter is thrashed out at the Council of Jerusalem.

There was, to begin with, no Church apartheid in Antioch. Jews and Gentiles ate together – something unparalleled in the ancient world, particularly since those Gentiles were not circumcised. It was evident that, whereas the Hebrews found their identity in the past of Israel and of Jesus, the Hellenists understood themselves as the link with the future, not as heralds only of a renewed Israel but as the vanguard of a new humanity. (Bosch 1991:44)

The apostle Paul insisted that the Gentiles did not need to become Jews to become Christians. For Paul this was an essential understanding of the inclusiveness of the gospel of God's grace (Philippians 3:1–11). Interestingly, the confrontation between Paul and Peter took place in Antioch, the first multicultural church. Gordon Fee supports this:

Homogeneous churches lie totally outside Paul's frame of reference. After all, such churches cannot maintain the unity of the Spirit that either Ephesians 2 and 4 or 1 Corinthians 12 calls for. God by his Spirit has formed into one body a radically new eschatological fellowship that transcends both race (Jew and Gentile) and socioeconomic status (slave and free). (1996:70)

Before the New Testament was written and canonized, it was the work of the Holy Spirit that moved the church to embrace a more inclusive mission among the nations (Acts 10). Stephen, a man full of the Spirit, made explicit what had always been implicit, that all people groups, not just the Jews, could now have direct access to God through Jesus, the Messiah (Acts 7). It was finally in Antioch, after the persecution in Jerusalem (Acts 8), that the decisive breakthrough into the Gentile world began.

The Antioch Church was, by any standards, a remarkable body of people. In Jerusalem the Jesus movement had still been regarded as a Jewish

sect, by Jews and Romans alike. In Antioch it soon became clear that the community was neither Jewish nor traditionally Gentile, but constituted a third entity. Luke mentions that it was here that the disciples were first called Christians (Acts 11:26). (Bosch 1991:43)

The apostle Paul later developed this theme of “one new man” in Christ (Ephesians 2:15) in his letters to the emerging churches. The early church seems to have been a microcosm of the city of Jerusalem with all levels of society represented. The solution was not to separate into “ethnically separate churches”, but to preserve the multicultural nature of the church. Michael Eaton notes:

With the Law removed from its central position in the life of Israel, Israel had been reformed. The Holy Spirit has been poured out on the remnant of Israel, at Jerusalem, on the day of Pentecost. Now the Gentiles have been brought into this newly restructured Israel, and even people like these Gentile Ephesians became “fellow citizens” with the first Jewish Christians. (2002:47)

The implication for us is that all people groups can now access God through Jesus, the Messiah, without giving up their culture and becoming Jews. This is a foundational principle of cross-cultural mission. Prior to this, Israel was seen as God's focal point among the nations (Isaiah 60:11). By blessing Israel, it was God's purpose that all the nations of the world would be blessed (Genesis 12:3).

This means that God's original purpose with Israel was to draw nations to him through them, for he is the God of a whole world (e.g. Psalm 47:2, 9; 100:1; 102:23). In the light of this, it is a mistake to see the Old Testament as particularistic (as if God were interested in Israel alone) and only the New Testament as universalistic (directed towards the entire world). (König 2004:29)

This universalistic understanding was not initially clear in the early church:

Jesus ministered, lived and thought almost exclusively within the framework of first century Jewish religious faith and life. He is introduced to us, particularly in the gospel of Matthew, as the one who has come to fulfill what has been promised to the fathers and mothers of the faith. It could not have been immediately clear to his early followers that the door of faith would soon be open to the Gentiles too. (Bosch 1991:20)

König (2004:35) notes:

Jesus' great missionary command after his resurrection was the first clear indication that God had introduced a new method of saving the world, and in this sense this is the true beginning of the New Testament. Up to that point God had tried to gather the nations to him through Israel, but then he turned everything around. From then on Jesus sent his disciples straight to the Gentiles (contrary to his own approach up to that point).

The problem was that, even after Jesus' ascension, the Judaizers retained the view that to become a Christian, you first had to become a Jew, a view very different to that of Paul, as we have seen.

These developments have particular application for the contemporary church in two key areas. Firstly, it is important to note, as evangelicals, that our knowledge of the Bible (and for the apostles the oral sayings of Jesus) is conditioned by our changing context. For the church to remain faithful to Scripture and effective in society, we need to take both Scripture and context seriously. Such an approach has a direct bearing on the self-understanding of the church. Over time the church in Jerusalem failed to grow in its self-understanding of Christ's mission to the Gentile world. By the end of Acts, it was largely absorbed in self-preservation (Acts 21:20–24).

We perceive something of this difference between an institution and a movement if we compare the Christian community in Jerusalem with that of Antioch in the forties of the first century AD. The Antioch church's pioneering spirit precipitated an inspection by Jerusalem. It was clear that the Jerusalem party's concern was not mission, but consolidation; not grace, but law; not crossing frontiers, but fixing them; not life, but doctrine; not movement, but institution. (Bosch 1991:51)

God was moving on by the Spirit and certain sections of the church that had once been the vanguard of Christianity found themselves limited by theological/religious tradition and cultural blindness, which I discuss in chapters five and six. An awareness of these limitations will enable the evangelical and charismatic church today to remain relevant in a changing global context. It is important for Christians to recognize the mixed nature of culture, because their reaction to culture tends to be far too simplistic, lacking any analysis beneath the behavioural level. We cannot simply consider traditional, more conservative cultures as being automatically more biblical, and liberal, or secular cultures as immoral or evil. Generally speaking, conservative cultures often inappropriately elevate their family or race to an absolute value, leading to the idolatries of racism, tribalism, patriarchy, and other forms of moralism and oppression, while liberal cultures elevate individual and human freedom to an absolute value, leading to the erosion of family, community, and integrity in both business and sexual practices.⁴

⁴Tim Keller, How the gospel should impact the society and culture in which we live. Unpublished conference paper, Johannesburg, 25 October 2010.

Secondly, a powerful testimony is created and the work of God increases as various ethnic groups work together for the cause of the gospel, particularly in a previously divided nation such as South Africa. This approach has significant implications for a biblical spirituality for the church today as cities are increasingly made up of a growing mixture of tribes and nationalities, cultures and languages, due to globalization.

I will now discuss the challenge of leadership in the changing epoch of the early church.

4.6.3 The challenge of leadership

The matter of wise servant leadership is pivotal to the development and continuance of a truly integrated spirituality in Christian communities. Leadership is often the glue that enables Christians to move successfully through changing epochs, and shifts of theologies that occur in the church as a whole. Leadership must not only teach God's word, but also live it out and apply it to the challenges faced by local communities. This involves internal virtues such as character and maturity, and outward actions such as justice and wisdom.

The apostles found an acceptable solution to the challenge presented by the Grecian Jews in Acts 6 as they upheld a strong focus on spirituality against the backdrop of a deep awareness of the concern for the poor in the Hebrew Scriptures and tradition. The apostles' solution needs to be understood through three overlapping principles.

Firstly, the appointment of the seven did not suggest a separation between the practical and spiritual aspects of church life, or between the secular and sacred, but should rather be seen in the context of holistic ministry that takes place in any community. "It is of some interest that the same word for 'ministry' (*diakonia*) is applied both to the care of physical needs (v1) and to the communication of God's truth (v4)" (Harrison 1975:106). This is because of a biblical view of life, work and ministry, where true ministry is primarily obedience to someone (God), rather than primarily doing something; achievement is measured by faithfulness to God, rather than finding fulfilment and identity in particular ministries/calling. Colossians 3:17 says: "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

Secondly, in solving the complaint, the apostles delegated the responsibility for the poor, at the same time involving more people in the work of the community. This delegation involved people of the highest calibre, thus emphasizing the priority of ministry to the poor. It also marks the origin of practical administration in the church.

Delegation involves:

- D – deciding what to delegate.
- E – electing to whom to delegate.
- L – listing what is involved.
- E – explaining the task.
- G – giving adequate training.
- A – allowing freedom to work.
- T – telling those who need to know.
- E – evaluating performance.⁵

Thirdly, the apostles simultaneously upheld the priority of the word of God (in proclamation/evangelism Acts 2:14, and discipleship/teaching Acts 2:42) and prayer as their primary task in the church (Acts 6:2, 4). They were not prepared to place the organizational life of the church above gospel preaching and communion with God (Matthew 28:18–20). This awareness of gospel priority in the ambit of early church life greatly helped to sustain an ongoing, vibrant Christian spirituality and evangelism in the early church. This in no way implies dualistic thinking or practice, but rather an outworking of biblical priorities in any Christian community. The priority of gospel essentials and the application of the word of God under the guidance of the Holy Spirit are foundational for the fostering and preservation of a genuinely biblical spirituality and Christian community. This is borne out in the New Testament, for example Matthew 28:19–20, Acts 2:42, 18:9, 19:8–10, 28:30–31, 1 Corinthians 15:3–5, 2 Timothy 4:2, Titus 2:1, Hebrews 6:1–2. Such prioritizing allows for differentiated leadership functions and roles within a leadership team such as Acts 6, including apostles and deacons.

The spiritual leadership exemplified by the apostles in Jerusalem was particularly important as the widows no longer lived on the land in a rural setting. They could not glean from leftover crops, nor were they guaranteed economic survival through their original kin group. They had to rely on the Christian community for survival.

⁵Source unknown.

We read: “And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great number of the priests became obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7). “J Jeremias has carefully estimated the population of Jerusalem at this period between 25,000 and 30,000, not counting some 18,000 priests and Levites” (Harrison 1975:107). By Acts 4:4, the number of Christian men in Jerusalem had risen to 5,000 besides women and children, which could have accounted for approximately one-tenth of the male population of the city.

The implications of the leadership of the apostles for the New Testament church involved learning flexibility, and working with the congregation to achieve a favourable solution to the situation. The seven that were finally appointed were not political appointments, as so often happens today, in church and community. They were appointed according to the principles discussed below.

4.6.3.1 Authentic Christian authority and decision making

The apostles exercised wisdom in appointing seven men with Greek backgrounds in order to relate well to the aggrieved Hellenistic widows, not assuming that members of a second culture would simply accept Hebrew leadership. The apostles therefore did not impose leadership. The early church needed a new group of leaders from a different cultural group that would be culturally sensitive to the unfolding situation. The church leadership was therefore indigenized. The apostles did not just discuss or pray about the complaint; they made a decision. Leaders need to be able to make decisions, and prepare God's people for works of service (Ephesians 4:12). Leadership is not a position; it is a function. A leader functions through serving, sacrifice, modelling, teaching and taking responsibility. Jesus rejected the secular model of leadership and pointed to a servant as the true Kingdom model of leadership (Matthew 23:8–12).

4.6.3.2 Credible leadership

Leaders were not simply created through appointment by hierarchy. They were already recognized in their own community as having the necessary character and gifting. Acts 6 serves as an excellent example of participatory servant leadership that upholds congregational involvement in the framework of apostolic leadership. The entire community was therefore empowered as they took collective ownership of the problem. The Bible tells us: “What they said pleased the whole gathering.” Good

leaders make decisions that are credible and for the good of others, not decisions that are merely for personal benefit. There were now a number of people with delegated authority over finances and resources to feed the widows. They were willing to serve by modeling true biblical servant leadership.

Elsewhere in the New Testament deacons are regarded as a supportive and more permanent ministry in the local church (1 Timothy 3:8–13). Some have traced their origin to Acts 6:1–7 as those who were set apart to take care of the more practical needs of the church, although Luke does not call them deacons. There were spiritual qualifications for the task. They had to be full of the Holy Spirit. They also had to be of good reputation. These character qualities were evident to the early Christians, and this led to them being appointed to facilitate the growth and life of the church. The spirituality of the seven men chosen was important collectively in helping to transform the negative spiritual effects of complaining, however justifiable it may have been.

The later text, 1 Timothy 3:8–13, defines the spiritual requirements for a deacon:

Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own household well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

4.6.3.3 The seven were appointed with prayer

The practice of prayer and “the laying on of hands” finds its closest parallel in the story of the appointment of Joshua as Moses’ successor (Numbers 27:15–23). This practice involved a conferring of authority (v. 20), and the empowering of the Holy Spirit. The apostles multiplied leadership at different levels as they laid hands on the new group of leaders, thereby conferring authority and “anointing” (divine blessing) on them to do the task (see Genesis 48:13–20). Anyone reading Acts with a knowledge of the Old Testament would recognise in the laying on of hands a continuity of the ordination of Levites (Numbers 8:10), and Joshua (Deuteronomy 34:9). They were not relying on leadership or congregational participation, but knew that they needed the power and enabling of God to fulfill his work.

The leadership given by the apostles was therefore sensitive and decisive, and did not create an unbiblical separation between the sacred (prayer and the word) and the secular (food distribution). It was the delegation of an administrative task within a holistic approach to church life. The Twelve did not impose a solution on the church, but solved the problem with the community, empowering them in the process. Johnson confirms this: "Leadership and power within the community of faith really can, under the influence of the Spirit, be fluid and shared, without resort to hierarchy and domination" (1989:85).

The apostles, in turn, would devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4). Preaching without prayer is unlikely to bear fruit. Prayer and preaching formed the essence of the apostles' ministry and leadership of the Jerusalem community. Both the tasks of food distribution and preaching and prayer were important, but for the apostles the preaching of the Word of God and prayer were clearly leadership priorities which benefited the entire congregation.

4.7 Summary

In summary, the spirituality of the New Testament church took on a distinct identity and character arising out of Judaism, as God's promises to Israel began to be fully realized through Christ and his church. Early Christian spirituality was marked by a response to the good news that the Kingdom (reign) of God had come in Christ and was now a present reality. The challenge for the apostles was to demonstrate the rule of God in an increasingly diverse community with spiritual and social needs. This challenge found practical application in the areas of poverty, culture and leadership, as we see in Acts 6.

With respect to the areas of poverty and food distribution, the apostles did not separate spiritual disciplines and social action, but upheld concern for the poor and marginalized as a pivotal aspect of apostolic and church ministry. In so doing, the community grew in understanding within a changing cultural context and a new group of future leaders emerged in a different cultural community. The leaders chosen and appointed displayed internal and communal leadership strengths which in turn released the apostles to continue to preach the word of God and pray. Thus the Acts 6 passage provides a very helpful window into the way the early church upheld a biblical spirituality and resolved fresh challenges in a changing cultural context.

Acts 6 also resonates with the key characteristics of biblical spirituality discussed in chapter one. Firstly, the early church community continued to encounter and commune with God. We see how the ongoing practice of prayer facilitated this in the early church community (Acts 1:14; 2:42; 3:1; 4:24; 6:4). Prayer was both a response to God and a means of seeking God. The early church experienced the advance of the gospel through prayer. We notice that the seven leaders were appointed with prayer.

Secondly, we see that the newfound identity in Christ of the early church community had a tremendous impact in dealing with cultural differences between the Hebraic and Hellenistic sections of the community and the formation of a new, Christ-centred community. As we will see in later chapters, this has significant implications for the church today as our cities are rapidly becoming multicultural due to globalization.

Thirdly, we note a deep concern for the poor as the early church loved and served people. This was probably a key factor in the rapid growth of the church, through demonstrating the love of God to a watching world.

Finally, we also see the importance of the Scriptures in the early church. The apostles chose not to place the organizational life of the church above their own leadership priorities of gospel preaching and prayer. As mentioned, their preaching was based on the Old Testament Scriptures and the oral sayings of Jesus.

In the next chapter I will unpack the value and application of such a biblical spirituality for South Africa amidst the current challenges of poverty, culture, and leadership. I will examine the implications of the following questions:

- Where did the early church get it right, with the resultant societal impact?
- How do we apply the principles and lessons learnt in Acts 6 in our context today?
- Where does the evangelical and charismatic church today need reformation in order to provide impetus in societal transformation?

We turn to the implications of these questions in the next chapter.

Chapter five: Implications of a biblical spirituality for the evangelical and charismatic church in South Africa today in the areas of poverty, culture and leadership

I will do a brief analysis of the situation and challenges in South Africa today before suggesting possible solutions. Although South Africa only recently achieved independence, it is still affected both positively and negatively by the challenges that occur on the continent.

5.1 African challenges

A brief review of Africa's recent history by Ntlha (2009:288) will highlight some of the challenges Africa faces, namely slavery, colonialism⁶ and neocolonialism:

First, Africa experienced an era of slavery, in which both the West and the East forcefully removed millions of African people from this continent and transported them to other lands. Second, this was followed by an era of colonialism in which country after country in Africa suffered the indignities of conquest and colonialism. The shape of our nation's borders, the ethnic conflicts, the suppression of languages, and the evolution of our politics and economies, all bear the marks of this age. In South Africa, we have known colonialism of a special kind, in which the colonised and the coloniser lived in the same country, governed by means of a cynical and cruel system of social engineering called apartheid. Third, there was the neo-colonialism era, which followed after colonialism, in which the fortunes of African countries did not change for the better, but for the worst. Time and again, the African elites pursued their own narrow interests and betrayed the liberation hopes of the African people. Corruption, nepotism and lack of transparency with the order of the day as African politicians presided over declining economies and unstable political systems.

Alongside this globalization⁷ has also contributed to the problems the world is experiencing today, particularly in Africa. In this global scenario based on capitalism's inner logic; competition "a process of exclusion and marginalisation of the poor has taken place" (August and Bowers 2005:252).

Wilbur O'Donovan (2000) also discusses, in his very helpful book called *Biblical Christianity in modern Africa*, a number of the challenges facing the continent of Africa today.

⁶ Colonialism can be defined as the acquisition, retention and dominance of an area previously controlled by one people by another.

⁷ Globalization (or globalisation) is the increased integration of international and local economies and societies by means of global networks, often to the detriment of less developed nations.

Urbanization is one of the major sociological trends in Africa at the beginning of the 21st century. This urban explosion is a major vehicle for the most significant new development in the Christian church in centuries. These networked world cities are becoming more economically and culturally powerful than national governments. Governments are increasingly losing control of the flow of capital and information. They have far less influence than the multinational corporations and the international financial, social, and technological networks that are based in the largest global cities.⁸ Similarly, the moral, political, social, practical and individual problems surrounding urbanization are also one of the greatest challenges to the church as we help people live victorious Christian lives in a corrupt, degraded and increasingly evil urban world.

Urbanization in Africa has led to the rise of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and the spread of Aids, as young people that grow up in the cities know nothing of the traditional moral values and restraints of their relatives who live in rural areas. Most of the world's Aids cases are found in sub-Saharan Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa is more heavily affected by HIV and Aids than any other region of the world. An estimated 22 million people were living with HIV at the end of 2007 with an approximately 1.9 million additional people infected with HIV during that year. In the past year, the Aids epidemic in Africa has claimed the lives of an estimated 1.5 million people in this region. More than 11 million children have been orphaned by Aids.⁹ The extent of the Aids crisis is only now becoming clear in many African countries, as increasing numbers of people with HIV are becoming ill. In the absence of massively expanded prevention, treatment and care efforts, it is expected that the Aids death toll in sub-Saharan Africa will continue to rise. This means that the impact of the Aids epidemic on these societies will be felt most strongly in the course of the next ten years and beyond. Its socio-economic consequences are already felt widely, not only in the health sector, but also in education, industry, agriculture, transport, human resources and the economy in general.

In my view, there is no other part of the world that has changed as dramatically and thoroughly in the post-World War II era as Africa. Political instability has also accompanied economic decline in much of Africa. The World Bank observes:

⁸Tim Keller, The Importance and priority of cities for gospel ministry. Unpublished conference paper, Johannesburg, 25 October 2010.

⁹UNAIDS 2008 Report on the global Aids epidemic, www.unaids.org, accessed 7 July 2009.

Despite gains in the second half of the 1990s, sub-Saharan Africa enters the 21st century with many of the world's poorest countries. Average income per capita is lower than at the end of the 1960s. Incomes, assets, and access to essential services are unequally distributed. And the region contains a growing share of the world's absolute poor, who have little power to influence the allocation of resources. (Mbeki 2009:10)

Against this brief background, we now turn to a brief consideration of the three issues arising out of Acts 6:1–7, namely poverty, culture and leadership.

5.1.1 Poverty

Much of the world's poverty is concentrated in Africa as noted by McGuigan (2009:263-264):

- 35 of 48 less developed nations are African nations.
- Sub Saharan Africa is the only region with the number of poor has increased. In sub Saharan Africa about 300 million people, nearly half of the region's population, live on less than \$1 a day (human development report 2006:44).
- Children under five in sub-Saharan Africa are 26 times more likely to die than those in rich nations (HDR 2003: 40).

The fact that many of the people infected with Aids are part of the workforce and wage earners has ramifications in terms of loss of production due to absenteeism, and an increase in poverty as families lose income on the death of a wage earner. This scenario also removes able younger leadership from communities over time.

Social welfare systems are inadequate. Generally, many African governments have not created systems of social welfare as Western countries have done. One reason for this is the cultural reality that the tribe, clan and extended family are seen as the means of caring for the needy. Furthermore, severe economic problems in many African countries have prevented governments from establishing adequate social services. With half the population unemployed in some African countries, there is not enough income from taxes to pay for a government-run social welfare system. Even in countries with many natural resources and the potential for extensive industrial development, selfish and corrupt political leaders can prolong a bad situation indefinitely and entrench poverty. Mbeki (2009:146) notes:

One of the most disgraceful but under reported scandals in Africa is the extent to which African elites export capital from the continent. According to the Commission for Africa, nearly 40% of Africa's private wealth is kept outside Africa, compared to only 3% of South Asia's private wealth and 6% of East Asia's. The small economic surplus that remains, as we have

seen, goes to finance the leaders' consumption and to pay for the running of the largely unaccountable state.

Christianity in Africa is deeply associated with poverty. Poverty is a result of a wide range of complex factors, only one of which is the amount of money you have to spend.

Of the world's 6 billion people, 2.8 billion, which is almost half, live on less than two dollars a day, and 1.2 billion, which constitutes a fifth of this number live on only one dollar a day, according to the United Nations' Summit for Social Development's definition. In rich countries less than one child in one hundred does not reach its fifth birthday, while in the poorest countries, as many as a fifth of children do not. In rich countries fewer than five percent of children under five are malnourished, in poor countries as many as fifty percent are malnourished. This situation persists despite the fact that global wealth has never been greater. Clearly the distribution of these global gains is highly unequal. The average income in the richest twenty countries is 37 times the average in the poorest twenty countries – a gap that has doubled in the past 40 years.¹⁰

5.1.2 Culture

It is well known that the communal support inherent in African culture has sustained its members through many years of exploitation and suffering. However, tribalism and perceptions of ethnic superiority in Africa has often added to Africa's burdens as one tribe exalts itself over another. This has led to disrespect, power struggles, even violence and genocide in its most extreme form on the African continent. According to Kpikpi:

Every tribe has a chief and the system of government and rule and priestly system is usually a visible demonstration of an invisible system of spiritual realities. This priestly system in Africa mediates between the world of the living and the world of the dead, which is believed to be full of spirits of the ancestors. Because these ancestors are believed to control and influence the present life, much of life today is lived with careful veneration to the ancestors. They are believed to influence health, business and prosperity, marriages, security, power and even the outcome of football matches.¹¹

This cultural influence also extends into urban areas as urban Africans retain a traditional appreciation for the role of ancestors, herbal remedies, cultural taboos and practices. In assessing the positives and negatives of African (or any other) culture, the church needs to draw on the Scriptures, experience and the insights of more than one group.

¹⁰Attacking poverty 2000/01, World Development Report, <http://go.worldbank.org>, accessed 11 August 2009.

¹¹Unpublished lectures on tribalism by Dr John Kpikpi. Africa School of Leadership, September 2000.

5.1.3 Leadership

Post-colonial Africa has had its fair share of oppressive, corrupt and ineffective leadership. Many now see the need for good leadership as the most important issue in Africa today.

Our continent Africa, is crying out for leaders who will lead their countries or organizations to prosperity, who will rule or manage with justice and fairness; who will exercise compassion and mercy and who will care for and be accountable to the people. The world and Africa needs leaders who exercise authority through inspiration, positive influence and service. (Ngara 2009:x)

5.2 South African social challenges

Twenty-first century South Africa shares many of the problems outlined above. In addition, it faces challenges of its own, due to its destructive history and current circumstances. South Africa has been influenced by Dutch and English colonialism and white rule (pre-1948), the apartheid period (1948–1994), and the social changes of the post-1994 period. Our history has also been characterized by the politics of race. Since 1652, whites have dominated the black, coloured and Indian racial groups that make up the population. According to Isichei (1995:299):

The South African experience is of particular interest to the historian of Christianity, for public debate has been couched, to a remarkable extent, in Christian terms. South Africa, moreover, is the only place on the African continent where liberation theology – called contextual theology locally – has had a major impact. This, of course, reflects the uniquely oppressive situation in which the black majority has found itself.

As noted previously, South Africa is a microcosm of the global society today, in its population groups containing facets of pre-modern, modern and postmodern society, in its wealth gap, and in the effect of globalization. The South African context has also been deeply affected by the growth of Christianity in Africa. Almost 80% of South Africa's population is Christian. Other religious groups include Hindus, Muslims and Jews. A minority of South Africa's population does not belong to any of the major religions, but regard themselves as traditionalists or of no specific religious affiliation. According to the 2001 census, 79.8% of the population were Christian, 15.1% no religion, 1.5% Islam, 1.4% undetermined, 1.2% Hinduism, 0.6% African Traditional Religion, 0.3% other, and 0.2% Judaism.¹² However: "This Christian presence is not reflected in the national indicators of a sound society as it battles with crime, corruption and a high HIV/Aids prevalence" (Ntilha 2009:291).

¹²www.gcis.gov.za, accessed 29 March 2010.

Regarding the inequality in the South African economy shaped by a history of injustice and oppression, McGuigan (2009:262-263) notes:

- South Africa has one of the most unequal distributions of income in the world. In South Africa, the richest 10% of the population live in luxury, enjoying 45% of the nation's income. In contrast, the poorest 10% survive on 1.4% of the nation's income.
- The long-term unemployment rate is 41%.
- 10 million South Africans receive social grants.
- Women are more adversely affected by poverty than men.

Now that apartheid has officially ended, there seems to be a lack of spiritual motivation and leadership to tackle the problems created under apartheid rule. While the struggle against apartheid seemed to be a galvanizing force, particular among the black church, there is a spiritual vacuum and lack of compelling ethic to tackle mounting societal challenges.

This is seen in the need for economic empowerment of the poor, tackling the Aids pandemic, rising levels of crime, violence and immorality, as well as the need for spiritual and moral formation in a growing secular and materialistic context.

There is considerable uncertainty about the future, a precarious existence. The people are unemployed and spend much time worrying about means of life and basic commodities. There is reliance on members of the family or relatives who are either on old-age grants or have jobs to support others. There is a great deal of dependency. The result is that there is a reliance on superstition or religion. (Makgoba 1999:139)

In light of these challenges, evangelicals and charismatics can contribute to the development of a genuinely transformed country through a renewed understanding and practice of Christian spirituality in South Africa today. Never before has the challenge of Christian discipleship and leadership been so acute in re-establishing the integrity of the church in society. "Never before have Christians been in a better position than they are today to do something about this need. Poverty, misery, sickness, criminality and social chaos have assumed unheard-of proportions" (Bosch 1991:399).

Churches in South Africa can make a very constructive contribution in areas such as poverty, culture and leadership by living out the gospel through demonstrating a love for God and our neighbour. We need to rediscover the biblical spirituality that existed in the early church and is exemplified in Acts 6, understand it and apply it in 21st

century South Africa with all its moral, political and societal challenges. We need to become hearers and doers of God's word by drawing on the holistic spirituality of the Bible (Matthew 5:13–16; James) to close the gap between what is preached and practised, especially in the partnership between local churches and local communities. Central to this task of ministry is a foundational biblical spirituality.

5.3 Living out a biblical spirituality

In this section I will discuss the impact of such a biblical spirituality in South Africa in the areas of poverty, culture and leadership. How can an encounter with God, love for neighbour and obedience of the Scriptures translate into changing people and society today? I will include the implications of Acts 6 in my reflection on my experience of pastoral work in South African church communities over the past 20 years.

5.3.1 Contributing to the reduction of poverty

As mentioned, the apostles tackled the issue of poverty in Acts 6 because of an Old Testament spiritual understanding of the importance of caring for the poor, particularly among the community of believers. It was impossible to be a disciple of Christ and be indifferent to the plight of the poor. Jesus grew up in a poor family, evidenced by the fact that his parents had to make an offering of two doves or young pigeons at his consecration after birth (Luke 2:24). The Old Testament made provision for those who did not have money for a rich offering (Leviticus 12:8). Some of the Twelve were from poor backgrounds. This historical and biblical understanding of concern for the poor became a priority for the apostles and helped them deal with the cultural dispute that emerged through the challenge of food distribution to widows.

5.3.1.1 Perceptions of need, a practical response and lessons learnt in the area of poverty

Through our involvement with the poor in South Africa, and by reflection on and application of the biblical principles found in passages such as Acts 6, our congregation was able to assist church communities in the Western Cape and Pietermaritzburg far more effectively. We discovered that, in the ongoing process of applying the Bible to our local context, we were driven to ask deeper questions of ourselves and the Scriptures. This in turn resulted in further personal adjustment and

application of the text to our context. This dynamic learning process between the text of Scripture and the local context is reflective of a biblical spirituality. Living out a biblical spirituality therefore assisted us to develop a deeper understanding of the gospel. Similarly, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we were able to respond practically to the biblical call to remember the poor by:

- The provision of short-term assistance, including foodstuffs and other necessities, i.e. food parcels. We began in the church community in accordance with Galatians 6:10: “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”
- Training in practical aspects of Christian spirituality, i.e. helping people to know God's will for them, helping with budgeting, financial decisions and accountability. This involved finding out about household needs and debt, and the reason for them.
- Equipping with skills to enable employment or other sustainable ways of provision, e.g. craft skills, business start-up training.
- Ongoing home visits for the purpose of continued encouragement, support and equipping.

We learnt the following lessons through this process:

- Seeing poverty at first hand rather than just by hearsay, New Testament passages such as 1 John 3:17 became very important to us. It enabled us to provide the kind of support that was really needed.
- Responding practically to the needs of the poor, not just praying for them. As we saw the impact of poverty in local communities, we were challenged to respond practically through the local church. This “loving one another” often happened through our small house groups located in diverse communities.
- Identifying new leaders. It was interesting for us to note that, once the poor had been empowered, they often emerged as future church and community leaders. Significant leaders such as Stephen and Philip emerged in similar fashion from the food distribution challenge in Acts 6. This link between tackling poverty and subsequent leadership development greatly encouraged us as we became aware that efforts in one area often had an impact on another.
- We came to realize that organizations like Project Gateway and other Christian NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) need to serve local churches, rather than the other way around. Due to our ecclesiology, and understanding of church and Kingdom based on the norms of Scripture and experience, we saw that parachurch groups play a vital role as partners with the church, but possessing a status subordinate to that of the church. This is vitally important in upholding a biblical spirituality in practice and not just in theory.
- The resultant impact on and challenge in our own lives. We saw the emergence of a more holistic biblical spirituality in our efforts among the poor, and the significant prophetic impact it can have on the South African situation. In South Africa the poor are mostly black and therefore our

efforts among the poor also involved encountering significant structural, economic and political injustice.

We were also deeply encouraged through this process of engagement with the poor as we experienced God's assistance and breakthrough in a number of communities we engaged with.

A biblical spirituality also has an impact on prevailing cultural practices, such as those found in South African society. We now turn to this issue.

5.3.2 Addressing the challenge of culture

In Africa an individual's life goals are not attainable in isolation because life is communal, involving a dynamic relationship with family, clan or tribe, ancestors, God and nature. Churches as a new community play a crucial role in African society, helping people cope with life's ills and challenges, recovering what is good and reaching those in traditional cultures, especially where traditional moral values and practices mirror biblical values.

The manner in which the apostles resolved the problem of food distribution, as they dealt with cultural tensions and upheld social administration, has important implications for a holistic spirituality as we wrestle with similar challenges today. It would have been easy for the apostles, at this point of its development, to separate the early church into Hebrew-speaking and Greek-speaking congregations. Yet there was a greater priority: to demonstrate the unity in the body of Christ and move the church forward, rather than allow division to arise from ethnic and linguistic challenges.

The apostles provided leadership that demonstrated the unity that Christ purchased through his death on the cross (Acts 6:5–7; Ephesians 2:11–17). They demonstrated to the Jews and the Roman world that the church is a community of the Messiah, and that its relationships, which are the backbone of church life, are to reflect the new reality of life in the Kingdom. Their example was the Lord Jesus himself: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). The fact that the glorious Son of God was willing to become a 1st century Galilean Jew was the most spectacular example of cross-cultural identification in the history of mankind.

Clearly this has been part of the failure in South African evangelical churches historically. Capitulation to the prevailing status quo severely damaged the witness of the gospel in society. Church communities often reflected the Group Areas Act, rather than God's multicultural family. It was in this area of racial and cultural integration that a number of the South African evangelical and charismatic churches failed during the apartheid era to demonstrate a truly biblical spirituality of loving God and one another. Instead there were separate churches and structures for the various racial groups, reflecting government policy, and virtually no integrated membership at local church level. Many South African churches upheld practices that were reflective of their particular context and understanding of the gospel. Hence, as noted below, socio-cultural evaluations were high on the agenda of our churches, as we sought to evaluate our assumptions and practices from a biblical perspective.

Although evangelicals say they uphold the Bible, in reality they do not always practise it, as seen historically in South Africa in the Rustenburg confession by South African churches in November 1990 of their involvement in the heretical policy of apartheid. We see this in the relative few white evangelical and charismatic Christians who objected to doing national service in the previous SADF as part of the apartheid state machinery.¹³ The implication of a biblical spirituality regarding issues of culture in South Africa include an awareness that the message of the Bible needs to be understood and applied afresh in different contexts where Christians live as citizens of the state. Those who proclaim the gospel must practise what they preach, or they will lose credibility, and people will stop listening to the gospel message.

A recovery of a biblical spirituality for the evangelical church will involve a process of re-examining the Scriptures, learning through interaction with other Christians that may be critical of aspects of evangelicalism, and learning from the rich traditions in evangelicalism. This process of recovery will be discussed more fully in the next chapter.

¹³As a pastor from 1985 to 1990, I attended a number of the SADF boards for religious objectors, while accompanying a number of our congregational members who had applied for pacifist status.

5.3.2.1 Perceptions of need, a practical response and lessons learnt in the area of culture

It was with a deep awareness of this prevailing socio-political order and the crisis witnessed in the evangelical church at large that our congregations, first in Khayelitsha and later in Pietermaritzburg, attempted to be a witness to the reconciling work of the gospel at local church level. The questions we asked were: What do homogenous groups and churches say to the surrounding culture that is often divided and segregated? And how can the culturally transforming power of the gospel be demonstrated?

Within the multicultural communities of the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, we attempted to apply the truth of racial reconciliation in Christ found in the Scriptures (Ephesians 2:15; Colossians 2:11–22). Our motivation, as we served in communities that were deeply affected by racial division, was not just for a new socio-political order in South Africa, but a profound awareness that we are already part of God's new society in Christ. This biblical commitment to community in a divided South Africa also challenged an individualistic understanding of life. Kretzschmar (1997:317) notes:

The point is simply that different classes perceive religion differently and it performs a variety of social functions depending on the variables operative in that situation. At the risk of oversimplification, the ruling classes use religion to impose control and conformity, the middle classes pursue individualistic goals (often at the expense of social justice for the under classes) and the under classes seek social change and transformation. Each, then, selectively uses the Bible and certain Christian doctrines to promote its own interests.

This biblical awareness and prompting of the Spirit of God found expression in the following applications:

- We taught regularly in the church from the Scriptures on our new spiritual identity as God's people, as a part of renewing our minds in Christ. We demonstrated this teaching through being part of a multicultural, reconciled community, and socializing across racial and cultural lines. We felt that, as apartheid had been socially engineered, there was a need for multicultural congregations to re-engineer and demonstrate God's new society in Christ. We received grace from God to persevere with this congregational task despite struggles along the way and the need for an ongoing renewing of the mind. We found that a white, individualistic approach to culture was often at odds with a black, community approach, resulting in misunderstanding and tension.
- We learnt to embrace the work of the Holy Spirit among us as the ground of our unity and diversity, rather than race or ethnicity. This involved

learning from one another's history, stories and prejudice, which exposed the weaknesses of our cultures and identified the strengths.

- We examined and challenged various cultural, social and sexual attitudes toward women, leadership, paternalism, death, money, sharing, relationships, marriage and *ilobola*, and ancestor veneration from a biblical point of view. We spoke about what was good, bad and neutral in our cultures from a biblical point of view, and how these cultural perceptions had caused us to interpret the Scriptures. At the same time we were careful not to deny or renounce cultural and linguistic differences, or to elevate them, but to allow them to be transformed by God's word and Spirit.

Increasingly the cities of the world are made up of a mixture of tribes and nationalities, and churches need to reach every kind of person. This cuts across the homogeneous principle of church growth theorists, i.e. the belief that churches grow faster/more effectively in monocultural settings. There is a real danger that homogeneous churches can easily be used as a justification for Christian segregation on the basis of class, colour or culture, as happened previously in South Africa. As noted by Venter (2004:144):

If we are too pragmatic, if we allow sociological realities and frames of reference to dictate, if we are too driven by church consumerism and the need for success, if we accommodate the weaknesses and discomfort of our people in avoiding the challenges and "unworkability" of multiracial churches, we end up being a copy of secular society and not the community of the Kingdom of God.

Finally, the lessons learnt in the process of engaging culture involved:

- Experiencing healing in our own congregation. At times the lessons learnt in engaging culture were painful for our church community and fraught with misunderstanding as we attempted to draw on the holistic spirituality of the Bible in the social contexts of our congregations. This process itself was sometimes radically countercultural to the prevailing social order. We found it necessary to pray for one another, walk in forgiveness and have our minds renewed by the word of God to facilitate healing and reconciliation.
- Recognizing the need to see leaders raised from every cultural group, as in Acts 6. These developments required humble servant leadership in dealing effectively with issues such as poverty and culture.

We were greatly encouraged in this process of engaging cultural differences and witnessing the emergence of a truly united multicultural congregation of believers.

We now turn to the topic of leadership.

5.3.3. Facilitating the development of servant leaders for the church and society

There is an ongoing crisis of good leadership on the continent of Africa in both the church and civil society. The moral and spiritual vacuum that exists in post-apartheid South Africa and the unfolding collapse of neighbouring Zimbabwe are daily reminders that “the Christian church in Africa is currently experiencing a shortage of spiritually aware, competent, credible and prophetic leaders. This is certainly one of the explanations for the lack of impact of the many thousands of leaders and millions of people who claim to be Christians on the African continent” (Kretzschmar 2007:4).

The leadership displayed in Acts 6 is important as I discuss the area of leadership. The apostles involved the church community in the decision-making process. The ‘deacons’ were not simply appointed by the apostles; they were first recognized by the congregation as leaders. We do not create leaders in the church simply by appointing them. It must also involve the recognition of their character and gifting by others (Acts 6:3; 16:1–2). “Appointments without gifting will soon lead the church into a cold institution. If a man is not called or gifted but holds office, he is simply an appointment, and we begin to drift away from biblical norms into religious externality” (Virgo 1996:127).

Continuity of moral leadership is desperately needed in Africa at church, political, economic, and social levels. Models of command and control must give way to learning how to have order and serve without control. This is a great challenge in Africa, still fixated on centralized control and managerial bureaucracy after decades of colonization and servitude. Unfortunately it is the poor and marginalized who suffer the most. This is also why so many African governments are struggling with the delivery of basic services to their people.

Community empowerment, the key to Acts 6, must involve an ongoing process of building the capacity of people to take responsibility for their own development. This enhances their human dignity. We found that local leaders are far more able to implement solutions. Church structures initiated by leadership foreign to the prevailing culture are often only sustained in the long run by outside funds. A local leadership team will often find local solutions to a local need. Acts 6 remains a model of leadership that tackles local congregational challenges while upholding genuine

New Testament process and consultation with the people of God. It is such application of apostolic and leadership oversight that needs urgent rethinking in South African church circles today in order to avoid paternalistic and controlling leadership patterns or appointing leadership that is not credible. We see a wonderful interdependence between apostolic ministry and local church partnership in Acts 6; 11:1, 22; 15:14, 22. In such a partnership there is both recognition of the need for input from apostolic and translocal ministry and the recognition of credible local eldership and leadership. Paul summarizes such a relationship with the church in Rome in Romans 1:11–12: “For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you – that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.”

The failure to embrace such a partnership creates congregational frustration and dependence on the one hand, and paternalistic and controlling leadership patterns on the other. The apostles were based in the local churches, and church life, mission and conflict situations were engaged at local church level, ensuring that leadership authority did not develop externally to congregational life. Later in the Acts account a network of personal relationships and recognition of “grace gifts” developed that “kept ‘the churches’ obviously and visibly one, yet without their being organisationally and hierarchically united” (Eaton 1995:103). The churches experienced spiritual unity in Christ, yet had different spheres of apostolic ministry. Paul, Cephas and Apollos all had influence at Corinth; John ministered in Ephesus after the apostle Paul.

The foundation provided and the impact made by the apostles in the book of Acts was therefore spiritual, doctrinal and relational – not primarily hierarchical.

This is seen at its clearest in 2 Timothy where Paul, knowing his death to be imminent, does not regard Timothy as his successor in the office of apostle. The impression we receive in the New Testament is of local churches loosely federated under apostolic authority, with each church managing its own affairs under the leadership of overseers. (Motyer 1984:37)

Although there was community empowerment through engagement with the congregation, the apostles laid down strict biblical criteria for leadership selection (Acts 6:3). In this way the church in Acts benefited from the leadership gifting of the apostles, which helped lay apostolic foundations, shape and give identity to the early church (Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 3:10; Ephesians 4:7–16). The apostles were not at

the mercy of community responses to the food distribution challenge, and did not allow their spirituality to succumb to fluctuating collective interests; they gave real leadership. In this way the apostles modeled Spirit-led leadership from a biblical framework, while upholding congregational participation in the process.

The application of this principle has been very difficult, particularly in post-apartheid South Africa where the transformation of racial quotas in leadership and management became the order of the day. In the church in Pietermaritzburg in which I was involved, we could not make appointments based on racial considerations alone. There needed to be a God component (full of the Spirit), and personal and community capacity (full of wisdom). Without exception, every time we failed to uphold these biblical principles because of transformational pressure, the entire community suffered. The church and even institutions of government and society fail because they do not apply these biblical criteria, and put people in positions of power and responsibility without the necessary character qualifications or capacity. Often corruption is left unpunished, fuelling a culture of human rights without individual and communal responsibility.

5.3.3.1 Perceptions of need, a practical response and lessons learnt in the area of leadership

In appointing leadership in the church, passages such as Acts 6, 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1:5–9 provided important biblical guidelines for our congregation in Pietermaritzburg in the areas of character, marriage and family requirements, along with maintaining a good reputation in society. In our project work in Pietermaritzburg, we also attempted to build in biblical criteria in order to remain Christian in our ethics and practice. This included the following requirements:

- Employees in our project work must be Christians, be involved in a local church, and attend our weekly chapel times for prayer, ministry of the word, and training.
- There were also character, gifting, and responsibility requirements, such as those required in the Acts 6 situation.

As a congregation, we worked closely with a number of evangelical and charismatic churches and leaders in the Pietermaritzburg church fraternal to break down historical, cultural and denominational barriers. We learnt many lessons from this broader multicultural evangelical and charismatic fraternal called 'Church in Action', who also sought to provide leadership in a historically divided city. During the years

2001 to 2004, we engaged as congregations (about 30 congregations in total) in a number of pressing city and community challenges in order to reach our city for Christ and demonstrate city unity. We came to see the strategic power of cities, and what was happening in our city, not just our local church. Scriptures such as Nehemiah 2:3, Jeremiah 29:7, Matthew 28:18–20 and Acts 18:10 became motivational for us. We realized that, in some ways, we had reduced the impact of the gospel and were not demonstrating a holistic gospel in our city or the province of KwaZulu-Natal. To rectify this, the churches identified five areas of need in the city. Different churches worked together to effect change. These areas of service and mission included:

- Cleaning up our city streets.
- Involvement in education and visitation of needy schools.
- A number of business people from various churches meeting to pray for and assist in job creation in the economic realm.
- Working closely with those infected and affected by HIV/Aids through a church based NGO we had established called 'Community Care Project' which also provided Aids training, education and testing in many of the schools surrounding Pietermaritzburg.
- Identifying the area of prayer and meeting weekly in various parts of the city, and bimonthly in the City Hall. We took turns to lead these prayer meetings and prayed into the many social needs of our city, inviting the mayor, police, educationalists and the business community to address us.

Besides this we also engaged in a number of 'city wide gospel outreaches' and saw a number of people reached for Christ. It was also a period of great encouragement to us as Christians living in the city of Pietermaritzburg as we saw first hand what could be achieved for Christ when diverse churches partnered together through the gospel. It was a mutual commitment firstly to the gospel (apostles' doctrine) that directed and sustained our partnership and fellowship, rather than beginning first with social activity, demonstration of 'ecumenical unity' etc (Acts 2:42). It is this distinctive gospel approach that is so often lacking today in social engagement by the churches. The lessons learnt through this period of activity, which may assist other evangelical and charismatic churches, include:

- On reflection at the end of this period of service and mission, the pastors and leaders realized that ongoing discipleship was needed in our congregations for the continued application of the gospel to the whole of life. While it was encouraging seeing the positive impact and pooling of spiritual, human, and financial resources in the city, we realized that discipleship using the spiritual disciplines was vital for prolonged spiritual development and leadership formation in South Africa. Despite the fact

that many of the churches in South Africa are growing numerically, there is often a lack of discipleship and the application of the gospel. When leaders live out their faith instead of merely giving intellectual assent to correct doctrine, it encourages a deepening spirituality in the congregation. It is such leadership that is needed and so often lacking in the church today. “If we are to take the example of Jesus into account, noting that actions were preceded by prayer and reflection (e.g. Mark 1:35–39 and 3:7–19), it ought to be obvious that activism and contemplation cannot be artificially separated without dire consequences for Christian ministry” (Kourie and Kretzschmar 2000:37).

- The establishment of a process of discipleship at local level. To facilitate this spiritual formation at local congregational level, we established a process of discipleship in which young men and women were discipled in small groups over a number of months in order to experience a deeper encounter with God and engage more deeply in the surrounding community. During this time they told their life story, which fostered identification, confession and accountability. They also memorized Scripture, and served in the life of the church and community (combining faith and obedience). They further engaged in a spiritual retreat or hike on completion of the initial process as part of a rite of passage into adulthood. In order to establish this discipleship process more firmly in the life of our congregation, we called it the I Generation Process, from 1 Chronicles 12:32. We felt that “understanding the times” in post-apartheid South Africa meant discipling and mentoring the upcoming generation, which is often fatherless due to historic societal upheaval. The process has proved to be extremely effective as discipleship needs to be more than just listening to sermons on Sunday.
- The establishment of a leadership school within the ‘family of churches’ we were part of called ‘New Frontiers’. We established a modular Church Planting and Leadership School (CPLS) in 2003 and 2004, to provide Bible and marketplace training and material for leaders on the continent through partnerships with other churches in South Africa. It provided a context for younger leaders to receive Bible and life instruction and mentorship by older, more experienced church leaders and fathers, exposing them to gifting and content beyond their local community.
- Training took place in different churches and communities around South Africa, exposing leaders to different perspectives on challenges and solutions.
- A fund was created to assist poorer communities to access the training and mentorship program.
- Other resources used to foster spiritual growth, discipleship and leadership included Richard Foster’s *Celebration of discipline: The path to spiritual growth*. It proved to be a valuable resource for leadership formation in our congregation to live out a biblical spirituality. Spiritual disciplines are practices developed and employed in the Christian tradition to advance Christlikeness, and foster growth and progress towards union with God. Many of the practices, as “means of grace”, are also communal in nature and impact on the totality of life. Richard Foster (1978) describes the spiritual disciplines as:
 - Inward – Meditation, Prayer, Fasting, Study.
 - Outward – Simplicity, Solitude, Submission, Service.
 - Corporate – Confession, Worship, Guidance, Celebration.

Similarly, in his book, *The divine conspiracy*, Dallas Willard notes: “But spiritual disciplines are also *spiritual* disciplines. That is, they are disciplines designed to help us be active and effective in the spiritual realm of our own heart, now spiritually alive by grace, in relation to God and his kingdom” (1998:386). What are the disciplines?

Willard lists them as follows (1998:162):

DISCIPLINES OF ABSTINENCE

Solitude
Silence
Fasting
Frugality
Chastity
Secrecy
Sacrifice

DISCIPLINES OF ENGAGEMENT

Study
Worship
Celebration
Service
Prayer
Fellowship
Confession
Submission

The spiritual disciplines are critical in the development of Christian disciples and leaders in South Africa today, both in the church and the marketplace; the inward disciplines of abstinence nourishing the outward disciplines of engagement. We found the spiritual disciplines to be vital for the South African context as many churches enjoy high attendance, but lack spiritual maturity at a congregational level and meaningful community and societal engagement. One of the lessons we learnt in our congregations was that concentration on the inward and corporate Christian disciplines to the neglect of outward aspects of service and work resulted in ineffective witness in the wider community. Similarly, in matters of engagement with young men concerning the disciplines of financial saving and planning towards the payment of lobola (bride price), pastors in both Khayelitsha and Pietermaritzburg were reluctant to get involved as this was seen as a personal area outside the affairs of the local church. In my experience, involvement in this area alone combined with an encouragement of young men to get married at a younger age will greatly assist in the prevention of the spread of Aids in this country. Marriage is one of the most neglected biblical solutions to sexual immorality in South Africa (1 Corinthians 7:2, 9).

Spiritual disciplines do not clash with the Protestant/evangelical belief in salvation by faith through grace. They are means whereby character and lives are transformed by both God’s grace and human obedience, as we saw above in the application of many spiritual disciplines in the practical areas of dealing with poverty, culture and leadership.

Charismatics and evangelicals have not always understood the difference between spiritual gifts and spiritual disciplines, which has retarded the making of disciples in these churches and led to narrow understandings of discipleship. Spiritual gifts or anointing through the work of God's Spirit are used to strengthen and enable growth in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:7). Spiritual disciplines such as study of the word of God and prayer are significant habits for personal growth and strengthening, enabling us to walk in the world without being conformed to it.

As mentioned in the examples above, the evangelical church has much work to do in widening the understanding of ministry beyond what happens on Sundays to avoid a narrow understanding of discipleship, in order to meet the spiritual, psychological and social needs of the people of South Africa in a sustained manner. As Christians, we must practise what we preach amidst a growing tendency in society to advance itself deliberately and self-consciously without religious foundations. This will undo the damaging effects of dualism where Christian faith is focused on the private, but not the public sphere. Similarly, it will avoid the spiritualization of the gospel to restricted spheres of engagement, and demonstrate that the rule of God personally and in society is part of the mission of the church. In commenting on the need for the spiritual formation of leaders in contemporary Africa, and the challenges that face them, Kretzschmar says:

Despite both much talk about postmodernism in Europe and increasingly in Africa, churches are faced with a huge residue of unresolved secularism, a society which does not perceive a need for God. God is excluded from culture, politics, economics, the environmental debate and the media. An important challenge facing Christian leaders in Africa is the growth of not only *secularization* (the decline of the social power of the Christian gospel) but also *secularism* (a growing indifference to or denial of God). Both secularization and secularism have long been reflected in the Western world, resulting in it being commonly referred to as "post-Christian". Already widespread among white groups in South Africa, the social marginalisation of the Christian gospel and disinterest in God are now increasingly being reflected among black groups, particularly in urban areas and among the youth. (2007:348)

I conclude with a summary of the key points discussed in this chapter.

5.4 Summary

In summary, we saw in this chapter the implications of a biblical spirituality in South Africa in the areas of poverty, culture and leadership. Drawing from passages such

as Acts 6 and lessons learnt from our South African experience, we saw the impact of a more holistic, evangelical approach in various local communities in the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. We saw that, whenever the church returns to living out a biblical spirituality under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it has a positive impact on the reconstruction of society, because a biblical spirituality involves a partnership with God. It therefore encompasses a personal encounter with God through Christ; a communal dimension through the believing community, and has a societal impact through mission and service. We saw that the evangelical and charismatic church in South Africa has not always held together these inner, communal and outer aspects of the gospel. This has resulted in a reduction of the impact of the gospel in society, especially with regard to the pressing issues of poverty, culture and leadership.

Key issues that emerged in this chapter include, firstly, an awareness of and commitment to a more biblical spirituality, where the gospel is understood and applied to the lives of individuals, in the church, and in society as a whole. Secondly, evangelicals need to return to the Bible and learn from previous evangelicals and even critics of evangelicals in order to promote the application of the gospel to the whole of life. In my experience as an evangelical, the impact of liberation theology and the emphasis on the incarnation of Jesus in a poor family in Palestine greatly helped us not to over-spiritualise the gospel. An awareness of the spiritual and social challenges faced by our congregations, and the insights and experiences of black Christians from a different class and culture, aroused my interest in a holistic biblical spirituality.

Passages such as Acts 6 are invaluable as a clear example of the spirituality of the early church and illustrative of some of the areas we should be tackling today. Such handling of the Scriptures needs to occur alongside a deeper reflection on the South African context, and the lessons South African evangelicals have learnt from our recent history. In this way we can use experience alongside passages such as Acts 6 in order to live out the gospel in more biblical ways. We saw how a group of churches in Pietermaritzburg from different cultural and denominational persuasions was able to have a significant impact on the city through understanding the prevailing culture and showing the relevance of the gospel of Christ.

Finally, this approach will also ensure that a biblical spirituality is felt in society as the personal, social and spiritual dimensions of the gospel are lived out. We came to the conclusion that an authentically relevant church should not only reflect the demographic make-up of the community it serves, but should also create church structures and leadership models that are relevant to the surrounding community in addressing issues such as poverty, culture and leadership.

In the next chapter we will look at further steps that need to be taken towards the recovery of a biblical spirituality in the evangelical and charismatic churches in South Africa.

Chapter six: Towards a recovery of a biblical spirituality by evangelical and charismatic churches in South Africa

As I have mentioned, many valuable lessons have been learnt through the South African experience that have influenced the development of a more holistic evangelical approach. A deeper understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ has caused more socially aware evangelicals to break out of the social restrictions of privatization and live out a holistic, biblical salvation. However, while I am aware that there are definite theological and ideological differences among the broad community of evangelicals in South Africa, and that these differences have often been exposed by our historic context, my argument is that major adjustment is still needed if we are to meet future challenges.

Historically, evangelicals have not done well in South Africa in terms of resisting the religious heresy which legitimated apartheid. This was seen in the muted response to injustice during the apartheid years, and the spiritual inertia that exists today in meeting the growing array of post-apartheid societal challenges. The critical questions still remain: What is going to produce the type of spirituality the church and society need? Have evangelicals learnt from their own history? Are we still living out a Christian spirituality that is largely unrelated to our context, and therefore too narrow in application of biblical truth? As McGrath (1995:122) notes: "The perceived lack of a credible, coherent and distinctive spirituality is one of the greatest weaknesses facing evangelicalism today."

Kevin Vanhoozer (2003), Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Chicago believes that evangelicals worldwide need to take stock at the dawn of the third millennium. It is clear that much has been achieved in a number of areas. *Time* magazine proclaimed 1976 the year of the evangelical. Institutions of higher education were started in response to biblical criticism, secular humanism and scientific naturalism. Churches have grown numerically, and programmes have multiplied for personal, familial and social development. However, Vanhoozer adds:

The surface success of the Evangelical Church masks a conspicuous lack of biblical and theological substance when it comes to reflecting critically upon the nature and function of the church. The Evangelical Church may be wealthy, but the quantity and quality of Evangelical ecclesiology is at

near poverty level. To make matters worse, there is all too often a pronounced disconnection between what we say we believe (logos, world-view) and the way we live (ethos, lifestyle). (2003:41-42)

The recovery of a more comprehensive biblical spirituality will help to correct the drift that has taken place and face the challenges that lie ahead in post-apartheid South Africa.

Drawing on the analysis contained in the previous chapters and my pastoral experience over many years, a recovery of a biblical spirituality will involve several key emphases and adjustments. As noted in chapter one, an ongoing encounter with God through Christ and a growing understanding of the centrality of the gospel of Christ is primary. The key characteristics of the biblical spirituality outlined in chapter one included: an encounter with God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit; loving others, and viewing the Scriptures as foundational for life and godliness. These key characteristics were confirmed by the analysis of the teaching and experience of the early church in the book of Acts. But this description of the characteristics of a biblical spirituality needs to be widened.

For instance, chapters four and five revealed the importance for a biblical spirituality of a focus on the Kingdom of God. A realization of the importance of the Kingdom of God will prevent a truncated and reduced gospel being preached and lived out by the church today. The rule and reign of God is not only directed towards the individual, a view that tends to privatize the expression of the Christian faith; it also involves loving our neighbours. It is through their focus on God and this Kingdom that the spiritual and moral formation of Christian believers takes place. Lessons learnt from the holistic spirituality of the early church outlined in chapters four and five will assist in the demonstration of God's Kingdom in the contemporary church and society.

Furthermore, chapters four and five also revealed the importance of the formation of a new community of God's people and Christ's new standard of ethics. This new community of the Spirit is an outcome of Christ's salvation and the work of the Holy Spirit. This means that it is necessary to place more emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit, as demonstrated in the life of the early church. Charismatics have already emphasized the importance of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, but they have all too often failed to engage with society because of a narrow understanding of the

gospel and Jesus' teachings about the Kingdom. Evangelicals, in turn, may need to place a greater emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers, churches and society.

Finally, throughout this dissertation the role of the Scriptures as foundational to early Christian spirituality has been stressed. No biblical spirituality is possible without the recognition of the Bible as a major source of evangelical spirituality. I have noted the importance of Scripture in the New Testament church (both the oral and written tradition). Given the analysis in chapters four and five, it will be argued that such a biblical spirituality is critical for evangelicals globally and locally in 21st century South Africa if we are to understand, experience and do what is required in relation to the church and society.

The following characteristics of a biblical spirituality are discussed at greater length below:

- 6.1 An ongoing encounter with God through an experience of the living Christ and understanding the centrality of his gospel of grace.
- 6.2 Understanding and demonstrating the Kingdom of God through the church as a new community that extends love for its neighbour.
- 6.3 The work of the Spirit and a new standard of ethical behaviour.
- 6.4 A return to the Bible as a major source of evangelical spirituality.

We turn to these areas now.

6.1 An ongoing encounter with God through an experience of the living Christ and understanding the centrality of his gospel of Grace

In chapters one and two we saw that evangelicalism is a form of Christianity flowing out of the Protestant Reformation which stressed belief in the gospel and a life lived in the light of the gospel. Hence the gospel is Christ-centred, a message of God's grace freely extended towards the sinful and undeserving. "In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them" (2 Corinthians 5:19). The book of Acts and the epistles concentrate on who Jesus is and what he did for us, and the effect this ought to have on our lives and society. This is the source of our spirituality: commitment to God and his kingdom as testified to in the life of Jesus and the Scriptures. What is the gospel? Simply put, the gospel

is Jesus. It is who Jesus is and what he did for us. Christ stands at the centre of our encounter with God. Christ is also the ultimate trajectory of the entire Old Testament text (Luke 24:27; John 5:39), and the main occupation of the New Testament. Faith in Christ and his substitutionary atonement on the cross are essential for conversion and the experience of new birth as a life-changing spiritual experience. The gospel is about seeing who Christ is and what he did through his death and resurrection, which has the profound effect of providing acceptance in Christ for believers. Those who respond to such a gospel of grace therefore want to obey God, rather than trying to obey God in order to earn his acceptance. Such an understanding of the gospel becomes fuel for personal and societal transformation. “Those who respond to the gospel have entered the sphere of the Spirit’s power, where they find themselves changed and empowered for obedience” (in Virgo 2004:59). This is what is needed in providing motivation towards a truly biblical spirituality in a nation such as South Africa that has experienced the harshness of legal and racial discrimination and alienation. The cross of Christ is therefore the major point of reference and foundation for Christian faith.

This was understood and practised by the apostles in Acts 6, and should be understood and practised by the evangelical church today. One of the key elements of evangelicalism is crucicentrism, a focus on Christ's redeeming work on the cross. It is this element that needs to be recovered as the key to showing the relevance of the Christian faith for postmodern society. But this will only be the case if the gospel is seen in the regeneration, justification and sanctification of believers. The gospel of Christ therefore needs to be preached and lived out in both evangelical and charismatic churches and in society.

There is also a need for gospel-centric churches, as seen in the book of Acts, where the proclamation of Christ led to the formation of a gospel community – the local church. Christians and churches today have, in the gospel and the Person of Jesus Christ, the strongest resources for demonstrating God’s alternative society to a watching world, practising sacrificial giving to the poor, mixing with people from different races and classes and the culturally marginalized, and providing servant leadership as demonstrated in the early church.

The evangelical church, however, particularly in the Western world, appears to be going through a crisis of confidence regarding the gospel. McGrath notes (1987:19): “Many have lost confidence in the relevance of the Christian gospel to contemporary society, and sought solace in social work and other spheres of action which were thought to be ‘relevant’ in a way which the Christian faith was not.” He adds: “Far from being just the basis of a ‘private’ or ‘interiorised’ religion, the cross opens the way to a radical and authentically Christian approach to ethics and politics.” In this way, personal faith in Christ is demonstrated outwardly in a changed life. Christian behaviour shaped by the gospel therefore involves this inner dimension, alongside an outer expression.

Ironically, the relativity of postmodernism and subsequent loss of identity provide a growing opportunity for the church to impact this present generation with the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is part of the prophetic role of the church in “making the best use of the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:16). Postmodern spirituality allows for the supernatural, the transrational and the eternal, providing the opportunity for the Christian worldview to intersect with it at several key junctures, such as the acceptance of the supernatural, the questioning of the autonomous self, and the emphasis on a communal reality like the church. The fact that the Christian’s identity is found in Christ serves as a bridge to this current rootless generation.

Alongside this understanding of the gospel of God’s grace must come a deepening awareness of the role of the church in advancing the Kingdom of God. Central to our ecclesiology is the awareness that evangelicalism, in its origins, was overwhelmingly a movement of spiritual renewal. We see this in the Evangelical Revival that occurred under Wesley and Whitefield in 18th century England. It will help to recover our evangelical heritage of the Great Awakenings of the 18th and 19th century, which has largely been lost to the church, but in which both the church and society were deeply impacted.

6.2 Understanding and demonstrating the Kingdom of God through the church as a new community that extends love for its neighbour

Understanding and demonstrating the Kingdom or rule of God in both the church and society is vital in developing a truly biblical spirituality in South Africa today. Since the pioneering biblical research of Albert Schweitzer and Johannes Weiss at the turn of

this century, “eschatology and apocalyptic have been rediscovered as fundamental to the biblical message for our time, and certainly central to any proper understanding of the mission and the teaching of Jesus” (De Gruchy 1979:197). Furthermore: “Many theologians now agree that Jesus and the Kingdom of God is the Biblical theology that most comprehensively unlocks the message and meaning of the Bible” (Venter 2004:139).

6.2.1 The Kingdom of God and the ministry of Jesus

Jesus declares that God’s reign is near (Luke 17:21), not some distant hope. The future has invaded the present. It has arrived, and yet is still to come with all the creative tension this brings to our contemporary mission in society. The future dimension of God’s reign is both nurtured and coexists in the present reality of that reign. “God’s reign is not understood as exclusively future but as both future and already present” (Bosch 1991:32).

It should be noted that Jesus preached the gospel of the Kingdom, which involves far more than the gospel of salvation. We see this in the way Jesus healed the sick, released the demonized, fed the multitudes, confronted the Pharisees, and included marginalized women of his day.

The other fundamental characteristic of Jesus’ Kingdom ministry is its attack on evil. This underlines the fact that God’s reign arrives wherever Jesus overcomes evil. This is especially noticeable in Jesus’ healing miracles and exorcisms (e.g. Mark 1:21–28; 6:53–56). Although Jesus does not specifically address the macroeconomic or political structures of his day, his ministry reveals a profound discontent with the way things are, and a desire to see them changed. His teachings and life are a radical description and example of the kind of life that ought to be lived by those who have come under the power of God. He covers the areas of anger, lust, divorce, love for the poor, healing, love for enemies, leadership, and the dangers of wealth, among others. “Every pericope in the section Luke 19:47–22:2 reflect in some way the confrontation of two social systems and Jesus’ rejection of the status quo. The trap question about the denarius (Luke 20:20–25) is the most openly political, but differs from the others only in that this meaning is more transparent” (Yoder 1994:44). This manifestation of God’s Kingdom is also seen in the way the followers of Christ cared for the poor, the lowly and despised, as discussed in Acts 6 regarding the resolution

of food distribution to the widows. Contemporary Christians need to draw on the implications of the life and teaching of Jesus in areas such as politics, economics, culture, leadership and life in community and society.

The message of the Kingdom of God is the central theme of Jesus' ministry. His call to discipleship is an invitation to live under the reign (government or rule) of God. Biblical spirituality is therefore Kingdom spirituality. "To be moved and motivated by the Spirit of Jesus is to be moved and motivated by an all-absorbing concern for the coming of God's kingdom" (De Gruchy 1986:26).

6.2.2 The Kingdom of God and the church as a new community

The perception Christians have of the relationship between the Kingdom of God and the church influences the way they think and behave. For example, what ought the role of the church to be in society? Ought a Christian to engage in politics, tackle injustice, and have an impact on socio-economic issues? This involves an understanding of the broader content of the gospel in tackling areas such as poverty, culture and leadership, as well as seeing people converted to Christ, healed and transformed. "The idea of religion as a private affair, of divorcing the spiritual from the physical, was an unthinkable attitude in light of the all embracing nature of God's reign ushered in by Jesus" (Bosch 1991:48). For Christians, confessing Jesus as Lord of all lords had radical implications in the Roman Empire, as we see throughout the book of Acts. They demonstrated a holistic spirituality which included many elements. For example, Acts 2 involved evangelism and baptism, teaching, fellowship across class, culture and gender lines, breaking of bread, prayer, healing and signs and wonders, material sharing and generosity, worship, credibility in the community, dealing with injustice and numerical growth. In Acts 6 we saw this demonstrated in the feeding of the poor widows, addressing the challenge of culture and facilitating the development of servant leaders for church and society.

By way of contrast, 19th century dispensationalist theology, as developed by JN Darby, saw a radical separation between the church and the Kingdom.¹ Dispensationalism influenced sectors of the evangelical and charismatic church through the creation of a worldview that encouraged withdrawal from society. "On

¹Dispensationalism as a system began with the writings of JN Darby (1800–1882) in Great Britain, but was popularized in the USA through the *Scotfield reference Bible* (Grudem 1994:860).

Darby's interpretation, the Church would escape, for there were no more events of prophecy to take place before she was caught away to the heavens. This so-called 'rapture' could therefore happen at any time, leaving the world to its fate" (Bebbington 2005:186).

Ladd (1974:262-277) summarizes five aspects of the relationship between the Kingdom and the church:

1. The church is not the Kingdom (Acts 8:12; 19:8).
2. The Kingdom creates the church.
3. The church witnesses to the Kingdom (Matthew 24:14).
4. The church is the instrument of the Kingdom, manifesting the power of the Kingdom (Matthew 10:8; Luke 10:17).
5. The church is the custodian of the Kingdom (Matthew 16:19).

Pettit² has expanded on the above outline and argues that, in a biblically based view of the relationship between church and Kingdom:

- The church is not the same as the Kingdom. The church or *Ecclesia* refers to the called out Assembly of God's people, while the Kingdom refers to the rule of God over all creation (Matthew 16:17–19; Mark 1:15, etc.).
- The Kingdom creates the church and brings the church into being.
- The church has been entrusted with the proclamation of the Kingdom and the power of the Holy Spirit, also seen in the early church in conversions, healings and signs and wonders.
- The church is to demonstrate the presence of the Kingdom here and now. The church lives in two ages at the same time, living in this present age, but experiencing the reality of the "powers of the age to come" (Hebrews 6:5). The church is meant to demonstrate now the quality of life in the coming Kingdom. The world should be able to look to the church and see something of God's eternal future.

Such an understanding of the relationship between the church and the Kingdom has several implications for Christians:

- Christians are not just churchgoers, but Kingdom people. Our lives are to be lived under the Lordship of Christ in every area, not just when we are in church.
- The church is a prophetic community of the Kingdom. This needs to be visible, for example, in our relationships, attitudes to people of other races, the way we view our money and position, and the way we settle differences. As a prophetic community, we need to demonstrate the "presence of the Kingdom" in our nation, which has no idea that the gospel is the answer to its deepest needs.
- The church is an eschatological community as we wait for the return of the Lord Jesus to fully establish his Kingdom in the new heaven and the new earth.

²Simon Pettit, The Kingdom of God. Unpublished conference paper, Bloemfontein, April 2004.

Psalm 103:19 and Luke 10:9 declare: “The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.” God’s reign is over all of reality, on earth and beyond. It embraces the whole of life, and therefore rejects dualistic approaches to the biblical message of the Kingdom, where life is split into sacred and secular realms. “Conversion, or our spiritual rebirth, means the re-orientation of our lives so that we no longer live in conformity to the values and powers of the world, but become part of God’s transforming purpose” (De Gruchy 1986:28). However, as we work out the socio-political implications of our Christian faith, we do so for the sake of the Kingdom of God rather than becoming fully identified with the ideological and class value systems of this world, such as capitalism, communism, or socialism. As we engage in personal, church, social or political issues, we must find a practical way of being in the world, but not of the world. This is a central challenge for South African churches.

We see this happening in the book of Acts as people from different cultural, religious, economic and political backgrounds were converted to Christ and filled with the Spirit. As the new people of God, they had a huge impact on the prevailing pagan Greco-Roman culture. It is such kingdom life, lived out in the power of the Spirit that is urgently needed in South Africa today to stem the tide of the generally ineffective witness and perceived irrelevancy of the church in society.

6.2.3 The Kingdom of God, South African churches and love for neighbour

These approaches beg the question: Why then were so many evangelical and charismatic Christians able to ignore the Kingdom of God and its implications in the face of glaring socio-political injustices and misery in post-apartheid South Africa? In my view, it is largely a result of a lack of awareness or critique in how we interpret the Bible and apply the Scriptures, and resultant obedience to God.

Firstly, there needs to be an increasing awareness that our interpretation of the biblical text is not value-free, and that the faithful handling of Scripture calls for an awareness of both the Bible and social reality, alongside the use of critical theological and sociological skills. This approach will certainly help to reduce the mistaken belief that interpretation can be free from ideological and cultural/class influence, etc.

Secondly, it involves awareness that the scope of the rule and reign of God is not only directed towards the individual (which leads to the privatization of Christianity), but also towards societies and nations. The concentration on individual ethics in the evangelical and charismatic church in South Africa has largely precluded the development of an effective Christian social ethic with a resultant impact of the rule and presence of God on society. Clearly love for our neighbour in the new South Africa involves making a renewed effort to bridge racial and economic divides. At a very basic level, this can simply mean recognizing people of other races and cultures, building friendships across racial lines and engaging daily with the poor people in our sphere of influence.

Finally, there is a need for personal repentance by evangelical and charismatic Christians, so that the Bible is not spiritualized to promote self-interest, but the spiritual, personal, and social dimensions of the gospel are fully embraced. In this way, a renewed understanding of the Kingdom will give us a broader understanding of the reach of the gospel.

Salvation is only an essential first step in the preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom. Michael Cassidy notes: "We have preached more a Salvationist theology than a kingdom theology. We have taught people how to get converted and be born again and find salvation and say 'Hallelujah, Praise God!' but we have not taught them a Kingdom theology and how to live under the kingly rule of Christ" (Cassidy 2002).

As we grapple with these issues in South Africa, we need a spirituality that is both faithful to Scripture and impacts on the totality of life. Can there be an African renaissance without such an African reformation, where such a theology and spirituality of God's advancing Kingdom is preached and lived out, instead of mere lip service being paid to the gospel (Matthew 5:13–16)? The combination of theological belief with ethical action involves not only believing the right things or doctrine, but doing them. "How to combine faith with obedience is surely the essential task of the Church as it enters the 21st century" (Willard 1998:157).

We will now examine the work of the Spirit as motivational in the recovery of a biblical spirituality for today.

6.3 The work of the Spirit and a new standard of ethical behaviour

While this dissertation has focused largely on the use of the Bible to provide the foundation and framework for a truly Christian spirituality, the role of the Holy Spirit provides the essential empowering of the Christian life in all dimensions: personal, corporate and societal. Effective Christian spirituality requires the empowering of the Holy Spirit for believers to live as the people of God in society today. The Christian life not only begins with the Holy Spirit; the Spirit is central to all ongoing Christian and community life, including ethical life.

6.3.1 The work of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament church

A careful reading of the Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, and Pauline epistles makes it clear that the entire Christian life and experience, individually and corporately, is lived “by the Spirit”. The Spirit is the *sine qua non*, the key element in the whole of Christian life (Galatians 5:16–6:8).

The coming of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost made possible what the Mosaic Law could not do. The Mosaic Law failed because it was not accompanied by the indwelling of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit empowers and provides motivation for the Christian life. It was the personal and powerful presence of the eschatological Spirit in the New Testament church that the apostles sought in appointing leaders to handle the distribution of food to widows, rendering them effective in being the people of God in pagan Greco-Roman culture.

The godly character of the men appointed was expressed in effectively caring for the widows through the distribution of food and the resultant peace it brought to the entire community. Such Spirit-filled behaviour provided an alternative to what was normally accepted and recognized. Men such as Stephen and Philip were later involved in cross-cultural evangelism, signs and wonders, and the powerful defence of the gospel of grace (see Acts 7–8).

6.3.2 The work of the Spirit in the Evangelical Revival

In the Evangelical Revival under Wesley in England, the transformational role of the Spirit and the impact of the Scriptures were felt in the church and society. Wesley kept a balance between love for God and love for your neighbour, and personal holiness of life. This is fundamentally a spirituality of these two commandments, and

a characteristic of biblical spirituality. This impact is not merely the numerical effect of the church as an institution, but the combined effect of the church as the people of the presence of God, empowering ethical life in all its dimensions: individually, congregationally and in the community. Twenty-five years after William Booth founded the Salvation Army in 1878, the combined impact of the organisation saw “each week 10,000 officers, most of them under twenty-five, punch home the gospel to the masses at 50,000 meetings. In Britain alone they visited 54,000 homes a week. Their twenty-seven weekly papers reached a thirty-one million readership” (Collier 1965:165). Besides this, they established food depots, labour yards for the unemployed, shelters for the homeless, etc.

6.3.3 The work of the Spirit in South African churches and a new standard of ethical behaviour

A high percentage of the total South African population is Christian, yet the experiential impact of the life of the indwelling Spirit has not always been felt in society as God’s eschatological people live the life of the future in the present. As mentioned previously, Fee (1996:xv), in his excellent book, *Paul, the Spirit and the people of God*, notes:

If the Church is going to be effective in our postmodern world, we need to stop paying mere lip service to the Spirit and to recapture Paul’s perspective: the Spirit as the experienced, empowering return of God’s own personal presence in and among us, who enables us to live as a radically eschatological people in the present world while we await the consummation. All the rest, including fruit and gifts (that is, ethical life and charismatic utterances in worship), served to that end.

Fee pleads for a recapturing of three key dimensions of the life of the Spirit today. Firstly, for the Spirit to bring life into our present institutions, theologies and liturgies. Secondly, it will cause the church to be more vitally Trinitarian, not only in its theology, but in its life and spirituality as well. “Ethical life will be neither narrowly, individualistically imagined nor legalistically expressed, but will be joyously communal and decidedly over against the world’s present trinity of relativism, secularism and individualism, with their thoroughly dehumanizing results” (1996:186). Thirdly, a genuine recapturing of a dynamic life of the Spirit will result in more effective evangelism and demonstration of the power of God in a lost, isolated, individualistic world grappling with the challenges of poverty, immorality, violence, corruption, etc. A genuinely Spirit-empowered life will include a demonstration of both the fruit and the gifts of the Spirit (ethical life and charismatic expression), resulting in the giving and

sharing of money and skills, living moral lives, building strong families and communities, being peacemakers, as well as preaching and living out the gospel, healing the sick, etc.

Evangelicals and charismatics therefore need to take stock of the current lack of the experience of the Holy Spirit and the avoidance of the teaching and application of Spirit baptism, which has had the effect of detaching Christians today from their biblical and historical moorings. We see a very different picture in Acts 6 in the selection of the seven leaders, who were required to be full of the Spirit and wisdom before they were appointed to new positions of leadership and responsibility. The adaptation of church structures in the early church was never considered in isolation from the experience of the Spirit. This is germane to a recovery in evangelicalism today of “being led by the Holy Spirit” in new cultural and contextual situations. It is this powerful and necessary combination of word and Spirit that is so needed today to prevent the church in South Africa from falling into error and irrelevancy again. “The Protestant principle has always been to see the biblical word as the external form of authority which is respoken by the internal principle of the Holy Spirit” (Wells 2006:174).

6.4 A return to the Bible as a major source of evangelical spirituality

Alongside a recovery of the Holy Spirit as a motivation in evangelical spirituality, we must revisit the role of the Scriptures.

6.4.1 The importance of the Bible for evangelicals

Evangelicals historically have had a high regard for the Bible, believing the Scriptures to be God breathed (2 Timothy 3:16–17). Evangelicals also believe their distinctives originate from New Testament Christianity. A major source for evangelical spirituality has been Scripture, lived under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, addressing the Sadducees: “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Matthew 22:29).

In the past, whole countries and cultures were renewed and shaped by the Scriptures, for example Luther’s impact on the German language, and Calvin’s influence in Switzerland, Scotland and England. We need to return to the Scriptures as the ground of our spirituality and apply the Bible and the gospel to our world as

Luther and Calvin did in their day. Whitefield and Wesley profoundly impacted their nations by preaching the word of God. Wilberforce went beyond the treatment of slaves outlined in Exodus to fight for the total abolition of slavery, based on the New Testament teaching that we are one in Christ (Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:15; Philemon). In so doing he obeyed the Spirit and progression of Scripture, not simply the letter of Scripture. We may need to apply the principles of Scripture to new contexts.

We see here a hint of how society may be influenced by the Christian gospel: “Law, education, and politics will function in a vacuum without our Judeo-Christian principles influencing their actions. The church is not the executor of the state, but it should be the conscience of the state; to do so demands that the church remains true to God's word” (Anderson 2000:17). In this sense the church is the “pillar and buttress of truth” (1 Timothy 3:15).

6.4.2 The need for evangelicals to rediscover the Bible

A return to a biblical spirituality where the Bible is read seriously, interpreted and applied today is further adjustment evangelicalism needs to make. Some of the problems that need to be solved are:

- People do not read their Bible.
- If they read it, they may misinterpret it, i.e. read it too narrowly.
- If they read and understand it, they may not be willing to obey what it says (it is too costly).
- They lack an understanding of their context and strategies that can solve problems.

Scripture is one of the areas that will provide focus, precision, and rootage to spirituality for an evangelical leadership that is currently lacking direction. Eugene Peterson notes that currently evangelicalism as a movement and tradition is largely impoverished. We need to recover the rich resources of our spiritual ancestors (1997:37):

Discover what Scripture says about spirituality and immerse yourself in it. This is not a matter of hunting for a few texts, but of acquiring a biblical imagination – entering into the vast world of the Bible and getting a feel for the territory, and instinct for reality. The scriptural revelation is not only authoritative for what we believe about God and the way we behave with each other, but also for shaping and maturing our very souls, our being, in response to God. The Scriptures provide as much precision in matters of our being as they do in our thinking and acting. Spirituality that is not

continuously and prayerfully soaked in the biblical revelation soon either hardens into self-righteousness or dissolves into psychology.

In my view, this is a key issue in our age, where we need to focus our energy.

McGrath (1995:186) calls on evangelicals to recapture adherence to Scripture:

Perhaps the most significant contribution that evangelicalism can make to the future of Christianity is to force others to realize that the liberal experiment has failed and the future of Christianity lies in returning to the New Testament and rediscovering the appeal of biblical Christianity. The Enlightenment insisted that this was naïve and impossible; the Enlightenment, however, is dead, and with it must die the petty restrictions it sought to impose on all western culture.

In this sense, evangelicalism has failed to enrich the spiritual lives of its members by neglecting its own rich biblical heritage. We need to recover this heritage to make its application felt today. Many younger evangelicals and charismatics are not even aware of this rich devotional resource. Evangelical spirituality can also “draw on a variety of resources within its own family history – the Reformation, the Puritans, the Evangelical Revivals of the eighteenth century, the holiness movement and the Charismatic Movement – in seeking to confront and transform the future, aided and challenged by the resources of the past” (McGrath 1995:133).

Although evangelicals love the Bible, they do not always agree on how the Scriptures actually function in the believing community, i.e. either as a source of correct doctrine, or of spiritual sustenance and direction for the believer. There is growing neglect of the Bible today and the ability to hear God through the Scriptures. Reversing this neglect has great relevance for the nurturing of a biblical spirituality for the church and society. Brian McLaren comments in his book, *A generous orthodoxy*, that we need Scripture to do what it was intended to do: “The Bible, he [Paul] says, is good for equipping people to do good works. It does so specifically through teaching (telling you what is true and right), rebuking (helping you see where you've gone wrong), correction (guiding you on how to get on the right track again), and training in justice (educating you in the skills of staying on the right path)” (2004:182).

6.4.3 The need to rediscover the Bible in South Africa

Genuine adherence to the Bible in practical obedience is necessary for us to be the salt and light in our culture. In South Africa today there is a danger of loving God but not our country, or loving our country but not God. Evangelicals in South Africa

should realize that they have a rich contribution to make in resourcing the church today, particularly because of lessons learnt through our recent history. As noted by Speckman in *A biblical vision for Africa's development?* "The Bible plays a central role in the lives of the majority of Africans. It is the only ecumenically shared document among millions of people, in Africa alone. In times of vulnerability, as the 1991 South African national census figures show, there is increased inclination towards the Bible" (2007:xxix). Evangelicals need to capitalize on this trend by becoming truly relevant to the postmodern age, and recovering and applying the Bible's spiritual heritage. Unfortunately, evangelicals have chosen to minimise the practical place of revealed truth in order to become attractive to postmodern seekers. As Wells notes, "Christian faith, constituted by the Word of God and the Spirit of God, is not just an outcropping of human beings' internal spirituality but something which, in its supernatural construction, in its uniqueness, stands apart from all other spiritualities. It is by the word of God, given to the church, that all religions and all spiritualities are to be judged" (2006:160).

Evangelicalism in South Africa therefore needs to rediscover its distinctive biblical approach to spirituality among the different approaches that exist today, and make it available to the modern church. This approach will involve taking the Bible seriously and, in so doing, defending the Bible and our faith from the accusation of divorcing the biblical text from contemporary context and historical realities. Such an evangelical approach "challenges other evangelical models which reflect either a one-way movement from Scripture to situation, or a division between biblical text and context which denies the effective agency of God's speech in the whole contextual process. On the other hand it challenges other contextual models in which the role of Scripture as a controlling norm is denied and in which it functions only as one of the referents in the process" (Walker 1993:163).

Part of this rediscovery of Scripture will involve an awareness of both the Bible and social reality in tackling issues such as the prosperity gospel that has made such inroads into South African churches. While the attraction of financial blessing may be obvious against the prevailing context of poverty, a biblical spirituality will also address issues of stewardship, character, and integrity in leadership, as seen in Acts 6. As mentioned previously, this evangelical approach will help to widen the

understanding of ministry to meet the needs of a South African society advancing without religious foundations.

6.4.4 The interpretation and application of Scripture

A text of Scripture can only be fully understood when we apply it. The New Testament is a book of applied theology. Scripture will in turn reshape theology as it is applied in the community of believers. Revival occurs as the people of God read and obey the Scriptures in a simple, Christ-centred way, in context. The art of biblical interpretation (hermeneutics) and the art of application into context are therefore not the same.

Christians and church leaders need to recover the original unity between faith and life that existed in the early church, that of exegetically based interpretation of Scripture for application to life. The implication is that Christian theology should be taught, understood and practised in the Christian church which upholds a fiduciary framework of belief, faith and commitment, so to recapture the original unity that existed between theology and prayer and faith and life. “In classical spirituality, access to God’s presence is gained through believing his Word and trusting in the work of the Christ of that Word” (Wells 1998:43).

There are some significant parallels in the application of passages such as Acts 6 with the challenges facing the church in 21st century South Africa. We need to read such passages in context, and ask:

- What was God saying to them then and what is he saying to us now?
- How does this passage affect my experience of God?
- What is the application and lifestyle that flows from it?

“The challenge of the application of Scripture is the question of the hour, especially in the last thirty to forty years. The reason the Bible is read less now is because even though we may understand a particular passage, we don’t always know how to apply it!”³ This is also the result of a lack of training and discipleship in the church today. David Wells concludes: “The most urgent need in the Church today, even that part of it which is evangelical, is the recovery of the gospel as the Bible reveals it to us” (1998:204).

³Unpublished lectures by Dr Michael Eaton, given at Africa Leadership School, Pietermaritzburg, April 2008.

6.4.5 Conclusion

The conclusion to this chapter will summarize the key elements of a biblical spirituality that needs to be recovered by the evangelical and charismatic churches to correct the drift and face the challenges that lie ahead in post-apartheid South Africa.

Firstly, we saw that this recovery entails an encounter with God through an experience of the living Christ and understanding the centrality of the gospel. Upholding distinctive evangelical beliefs and identity is precisely what makes the gospel relevant and attractive again to a generation in search of identity and community. The solution is not to change or move on from the gospel, but to continue to believe “it is the power of God for salvation” (Romans 1:16), and interpret it anew for this current generation.

Secondly, I discussed a fresh understanding and demonstration of the Kingdom of God through the church as a new community that extends love to its neighbour. The church’s proclamation of the rule of God both to individuals and society forms part of the establishment of a holistic biblical spirituality that is so needed today. It is an understanding of the Kingdom of God that resists false separations between the worship of the church and its prophetic witness in areas such as poverty alleviation, cultural separation, and lack of servant leadership.

Thirdly, I discussed a recovery of the work of the Spirit and a new standard of ethical behaviour. Even though the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was a primary event for the empowering of the church, it has not always been an experiential reality for many evangelicals and charismatics today. It is here that the evangelical and charismatic church has failed, in neglecting the work of the Holy Spirit in biblical spirituality. It is the presence of the Spirit poured out on people that revives the church and impacts society, as seen in the early church and church history. Evangelical awareness needs to include a return to the biblical conviction about the role of the Holy Spirit in empowering God’s people collectively to have a lasting impact on society. The early disciples needed the baptism in the Spirit as a prerequisite for effective witness. It is this collective impact as the empowered people of God that will bring about an awareness of God and raise levels of morality in society.

Finally, we saw that there is a need to return to the Bible as a major source of evangelical spirituality. The Scriptures shaped the teaching and life of the early church in the proclamation of the gospel, the spiritual formation of new converts and leaders, and the impact on society as seen in the feeding of the widows in Acts 6. There needs to be such a return to the Scriptures in evangelicalism. Evangelicalism in South Africa has an opportunity to develop an evangelical/charismatic understanding of biblical interpretation, including devotional reading, personal and church application and relevance to society as a whole. Evangelicalism should be devoting its considerable strengths to the forging of patterns of spirituality suited to a recovery of an evangelical ethos which involves a deep love of and commitment to Scripture alongside an ongoing reflection of and involvement in South African society.

The concluding chapter, chapter seven, summarizes the need for a biblical spirituality to bring internal renewal and transformational ministry to the evangelical and charismatic South African church today.

Chapter seven: Conclusion

In this final chapter, I will draw brief conclusions from the preceding chapters in order to summarize the main thrust of this dissertation. This dissertation has argued for the rediscovery of a biblical spirituality in order to bring internal renewal and transformational ministry to evangelical and charismatic churches in South Africa today. The question that has been asked consistently is: What should be done in the here and now, particularly as the church in South Africa seeks to advance the Kingdom of God?

In *chapter one* I embarked on an academic investigation of what constitutes a biblical spirituality and how it impacts the evangelical and charismatic church in contemporary South Africa. I argued that we need a holistic, biblical spirituality that changes the individual and Christian communities in such a radical way that it has a transformative effect on society. The characteristics of a biblical spirituality include, firstly, an encounter with God who reveals himself to us as the one God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Secondly, this encounter with God extends to loving and taking responsibility for others, i.e. loving God and my neighbour. Thirdly, we saw that the Scriptures become foundational to a biblical spirituality as God reveals himself and sustains our spirituality through the Bible, and our Christian experience in turn deepens our understanding of God and the Scriptures. How the Bible is understood, interpreted and applied has a huge bearing on whether the spirituality of Christians and churches is, in fact, biblical in character and applied practically in a society such as South Africa. It is therefore important to learn from Christians from earlier historical periods who sought to have an impact for God on the society in which they lived. This dissertation has argued that, unless the theology and practice of church members changes and deepens, the church will not become an agent of transformation, but will remain part of the problem in an unequal and divided society such as South Africa.

Chapter two consisted of a detailed discussion of who the evangelicals and charismatics are as groups, both globally and locally. Their respective histories were noted, alongside the unity and differences between these two groups over an extended period. We noted the historical influences on evangelicals and charismatics in South Africa today, along with the development of the subsequent strengths,

weaknesses and commonality in the complexities of their theological and traditional heritages. We saw that these developments gave rise to a historical journey that “resulted in an evangelicalism in 20th century South Africa that did not engage the powers, as colonialism led to apartheid and systematic racial oppression” (Venter and Ntlha 2005:149). These church groupings have generally emphasized a privatized personal faith to the neglect of involvement and prophetic witness in the public realm, particularly during the apartheid years. Such a privatized understanding of the gospel is incompatible with a truly biblical spirituality.

We saw that, in seeking to develop a biblical spirituality, evangelicals and charismatics in South Africa need to learn from our collective past and live out the gospel in such a way that it has a constructive impact on society in assisting in the task of nation building. Clearly there is still much work to be done by the church in this country in preparing for the future through the establishment of a biblical spirituality that brings correction to distorted understandings of who God is, how we should respond to others in a diverse society, and how the Bible should be read and applied today.

Chapter three dealt with the methodology employed in the dissertation and the use of the Bible as a unifying factor for the purpose of deepening the Christian life. The methodology used was mainly theoretical, involving an analysis of many books on Christian spirituality, biblical spirituality, the evangelicals, charismatics, and the church in South Africa. Particular emphasis was placed on the use of the Bible for the development of a biblical spirituality in the church today, i.e. the analysis and application of the biblical text, such as Acts 6:1–7.

The methodology used was also empirical, involving critical reflection on my own church experience over many years in diverse South African communities. This was undertaken with an awareness of the deep challenges of 21st century South African society. This chapter also explained how Christian spirituality and biblical interpretation have been understood in different historic periods, and how they need to be understood in contemporary South Africa from an evangelical/charismatic point of view.

We saw that such an integrated approach that does not separate the Bible from daily living has profound implications for the church and society today. The experience of South Africans through our recent turbulent past has positively influenced the development of a more biblical spirituality involving careful exegesis of the text, and awareness of the ways in which our own ideologies/worldviews influence our interpretation of the text. Social context and theological position therefore influence interpretation. It was noted that interpreters must be aware that understandings of the gospel are not value free; ideological influences stemming from our social grouping and culture have an impact on how we understand and live out the Bible. It is these valuable lessons, learnt through our recent history, that will help us to contextualize our Christianity as we move into the future with a richer understanding of God's will for a renewed world without losing the biblical distinctiveness and power of the gospel.

In *chapter four* the socio-political and economic context of the New Testament was discussed, as well as the spread of Christianity as outlined in the book of Acts following the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The prevailing spirituality of the early church was noted, including the following characteristics: early Christian spirituality was shaped by an intimate and ongoing experience of God; an understanding of the Kingdom of God and Christ's new standard of ethics; they were in essence a community of the Spirit; and the Scriptures were foundational as a guide to life and godliness. The biblical, cultural and geographic context of Acts 6 was analyzed as the situation of Acts 6:1–7 provided the apostles with a number of parallel challenges to those we currently face in 21st century South Africa. These challenges involve the working out a biblical spirituality in areas of poverty; living together in a diverse, multicultural society, and credible leadership in the church and society. We saw how the early apostles applied themselves under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in tackling the areas of poverty, bridging cultural barriers as part of a more inclusive mission among the nations, and exemplifying wise, servant leadership that resulted in excellent decision making, delegation of tasks, community empowerment and the resultant spread of the gospel.

The specific lessons learnt regarding poverty, culture and leadership have great relevance in demonstrating a truly biblical spirituality in South Africa today. The apostolic action in Acts 6 confirmed the gospel of Jesus Christ on two fronts. Firstly,

they confirmed a holistic Old Testament understanding of life and ministry. The apostles therefore resisted separating the spiritual welfare of people from their daily experiences in the world. Early Christian spirituality held together an encounter with God through prayer, worship and devotion to the Scriptures and the oral teachings of Jesus alongside caring for widows across cultural and ethnic lines. For evangelicals and charismatics today, that means we need to take both Scripture and context seriously in order to continue to play a prophetic role in a rapidly changing global context. Secondly, the apostles took the first steps towards establishing a truly inclusive, multicultural church community as they grappled with issues of poverty across cultural groups and appointed a new generation of leaders. This has huge bearing for South African churches today as we become microcosms of our cities and regions with all levels and cultures represented. This has increasing relevance as our cities continue to grow rapidly through urbanization and increase in diversity, numbers of poor people and the next rising generation of leaders. If the evangelical and charismatic churches do not find new ways of meeting these growing urban challenges, we will find ourselves on the outside looking in with no real voice in public affairs and a leadership out of step with a rapidly changing epoch.

In *chapter five* I made a brief analysis of the situation on the African continent, and the challenges we face in South Africa. The implications of a biblical spirituality for the evangelical and charismatic church in South Africa were applied to the areas of contributing to the reduction of poverty, addressing the challenge of culture and facilitating the development of servant leaders for the church and society.

The many positive applications drawn from passages such as Acts 6 in respect of the practical response to poverty, culture and leadership challenges revealed that the church can make a huge difference in practising a biblical spirituality in South Africa today. We saw this in the following areas: identifying and providing hope for the poor as the church becomes their new extended family, contextualizing the gospel in ways that the hearers can understand without compromising the essential message of Jesus Christ, and the facilitation and development of a new breed of servant leaders for the church and society. This powerful combination of lessons learnt through history and personal reflection, and the application of the Scriptures under the guidance of the Holy Spirit provides important reference points for the church today to deeply impact their cities and regions for God.

In *chapter six* we looked at further steps that need to be taken towards a recovery of a biblical spirituality in the evangelical and charismatic churches in South Africa. The characteristics of a biblical spirituality initially identified were: an ongoing encounter with God through an experience of the living Christ, loving God and neighbour and the scriptures as foundational for Christian spirituality. These characteristics were later widened and discussed at greater length. First, it was noted that the gospel and the person of Jesus Christ provide the strongest resources for helping the poor, uniting cultures and providing internal motivation for servant leadership. There is a massive need today for developing gospel-centric churches as a means of reaching the current, often rootless generation. Secondly, biblical spirituality involves an awareness of the Kingdom of God and the ministry of Jesus, now demonstrated through the church. Renewed churches can play a vital role in advancing the Kingdom of God in local communities through a richer and clearer understanding of the gospel. Thirdly, the work of the Spirit was discussed, especially in the New Testament church but also in key periods of Church history such as the Evangelical Revival. The need for a deeper work of the Spirit in South African churches was highlighted. Finally, the essential aspect of a return to and a rediscovery of the Bible through reading, interpreting and applying Scripture to the lives of disciples, and through them to society at large were discussed.

We noted that such a recovery of a biblical spirituality with a renewed focus on the gospel by the evangelical and charismatic churches would greatly assist in the recovery of a more credible, coherent and distinctive biblical spirituality in South Africa today. In this way the gospel becomes transformational and creates a worldview that touches every area of life: the way you live, the way you conduct your family life, do business, help the poor, etc. The gospel is not merely knowing about God intellectually, but experiencing new life. This new life involves a willingness to obey Jesus as Lord and live a life of discipleship.

There is a need to understand and demonstrate the Kingdom of God through the church. In the area of servant leadership alone, there is a huge opportunity to have a lasting impact on the church and society in South Africa. "At no place do the ethics of the kingdom of God clash more vigorously with the ethics of the world than in the matters of power and service" (Edwards 2002:325). This has become one of the pressing issues in post-apartheid South Africa as the lack of skills and capacity in the

ANC-ruled and staffed municipalities struggle to provide basic service delivery to the poor. This is seen in the current upheavals in poor communities that are protesting weak leadership in local government.⁴

We saw the importance of the work of the Spirit in South African churches and the current lack of the experience of the Holy Spirit. We saw the essence of the New Covenant that Jesus inaugurated through his death and resurrection, a covenant of the Spirit empowering believers to live the life of God in the present (Jeremiah 31:31; Acts 1:8). A return to a focus on the Holy Spirit founded on the biblical witness will empower ineffective witness and local church irrelevancy in the evangelical and charismatic church in South Africa today. Such a response will, of necessity, involve a rejection of a narrow piety and a return to the centrality of the experience and life of the Spirit as evidenced in the early church as they faced challenges such as the food distribution to widows across a cultural divide.

We saw the importance of the Bible for evangelicals and charismatics, and the current need in the South African church for a rediscovery and faithful application of the Bible's message for today. The Scriptures need to inform our character and conduct as we grapple with issues of poverty, cultural diversity, leadership formation and gospel growth. This must occur alongside a broader understanding of Christian spirituality that consists of an awareness of both the Bible and social reality, avoids the damaging effects of spiritualization, and upholds a gospel that is both biblical and contextual.

In conclusion, the churches in South Africa currently have an excellent opportunity to continue to assist in nation building, if they are able to recover the rich spirituality of the evangelical tradition. Examples of the positive impact churches can make in the area of addressing the challenges of poverty, culture and leadership were also discussed throughout this dissertation. Central to such a recovery of a biblical spirituality is a return to the application of the Scriptures for faith and life. Acts 6:1–7 provides but one example of how the early church held together theology and spirituality in a conflict situation for the purpose of effecting change in congregational and community life. This involves returning to the rich sources of evangelical spirituality, where the Bible is the unifying feature alongside the empowering work of

⁴Where are the leaders? *Natal Witness*, 28 July 2009.

the Holy Spirit; and the purpose of interpreting Scripture is for the deepening of the Christian life. It is such a biblical spirituality that is needed in 21st century South Africa today.

Alongside this, there is a growing opportunity, afforded by the current interest in spirituality globally, as churches awake to the need for spiritual renewal, and as a rapidly expanding urban society shifts from a modern to a postmodern culture. My prayer is that we will awake and make the most of this present opportunity. In the words of Paul, “Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand (Romans 12:11-12).

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