CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCING THE ISSUES

1.1. INTRODUCTION

The term ‘theology” is derived from two Greek words “theos” and “logos”, the former meaning “God” and the latter “word”. In the narrow sense therefore, theology may be defined as the doctrine of God. Dr E van Niekerk (1980:4) refers that theology is reflection on God and should include reflection on people and their world. Hill, Knitter and Madges (1995:251) refers to theology both as a process and product. Its product is the inherited belief’s, rules and practices. Its process is reflecting critically upon the way people of a particular religious tradition live out their faith.

Social location often determines or at least influences people’s view of themselves and the world around them. This work therefore, begins with the reality and some summarised history of the oppressed Coloured people.

1.2. BACKGROUND: OPPRESSION OF THE “COLOURED” PEOPLE

Coloured people were never a separate nation, a people a volk or a tribe. The term “coloured” is offensive to the people so labelled. It has often been said that the first “coloured” person was born nine (9) months after the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck in 1652. A considerable number of “coloured” people originated in the Cape. They moved to the urban districts of the Rand for economic reasons. Getrude Millin (1951:1) refers to the ”coloured” as:

The black and yellow people who live in squalor and diseases all around them … they are Gods step-children-those-dark skinned aboriginals, those whole nations of half-castes, on whom the Divine hand rests so heavily.
A “coloured” person became a “coloured” for no logical reason: the only motivation for such a step was racism. Roy H du Pré (1994:17) wrote the following:

The National party created a new volk, the Coloured people. These people were examined more closely than they would have been by a medical doctor or anthropologist. The size of their skull, the shape of the nose, the texture of the hair, the condition of the blood and the speech or accent all become determinants of that person’s future position in South African society.

The following are preliminary remarks on the research undertaken, on the basis of which this discursive report is presented in this form.

1.3. THE BIRTH OF THIS RESEARCH

For the last three years I have followed the structured Masters program in Systematic Theology. In this process I have learned that different theologians wrote differently on the doctrine of God. Although these theologians style of writing is different I have discovered that there is no contradiction or heresy when they deal with the doctrine of God. In paper one “Methodology” the aim of this paper was to encourage, help and teach students to discover and express their own way of thinking.

In paper two “History of Theology” throughout this paper one sees how the doctrine of God developed from one era to the next. In paper three of the Masters program I did compare the doctrine of God of Bonganjalo Goba, Alister McGrath and Rosemary Ruether, Goba’s understanding of God is that a new God in Africa must be projected against the traditional idea of a God in the sky far away from peoples suffering. God is only known through Jesus Christ (Goba 1988:37). McGrath in dealing with the doctrine of God follows a historical perspective. One of the outstanding features of
McGrath on the doctrine of God is, the answering of the question, can God suffer? He answers this question with the words of Moltman when he writes:

A God who cannot suffer is poorer than any human. For a God who is incapable of suffering is a being who cannot be involved. Suffering and injustice do not affect him. And because he is so completely insensitive, he cannot be affected or shaken by anything. He cannot weep, for he has no tears. But one who cannot suffer cannot love either. So he is a loveless being (McGrath 1994:253).

For Ruether, God is the one who vindicates the oppressed. God is the one who represent the oppressed woman. Ruether is trying to re-imagine the concept of God in the social discrimination of woman and the specific circumstances and context of woman’s experiences.

All these factors in the structured program influence my thinking in this dissertation. I had found the doctrine of God to be the highlight in the structured Masters program. As I continue to read in the area, I became aware of some observation, which I wanted to test by more extensive research. For the past seventeen years I grew up spiritually in a Pentecostal Church and became aware that only the traditional way on the doctrine of God was addressed. The traditional doctrine of God is usually the existence of God, the decrees of God, the works of God etc. These are all important facts in theology, however, I grew up as a black person under oppression, extreme poverty and a black context. I felt I had to ask myself the question, what does God mean to people under such conditions? I am grateful to Crystal Tabernacle whom I can identify with, who sees God active in the African context of black people.

In contrast to how both the Europeans and Americans brought and taught “traditional” theology to us, my aim is to argue for a new way of doing theology. Gerald West (2003:XII) argues this point as follows:
The theologians from Europe and North America are dominant today in our churches and represent one form of our cultural domination. They must be understood to have arisen out of situations related to those countries, and therefore must be uncritically adopted without our raising the question of their relevance in the context of our countries. Indeed, we must, in order to be faithful to the gospel and to our peoples, reflect on the realities of our own situations and interpret the word of God in relation to these realities. We reject as irrelevant an academic type of theology that is divorced from action. We are prepared for a radical break in epistemology, which makes commitment the first act of theology and engages in critical reflection on the praxis of the reality of the Third World.

This been the case, several points stand out from this critical reflection upon the conditions of the Third World on the one hand, and the Irrelevancies of a non-action theology of academia on the other hand, as Gerald West has indicated above. For one, it is clear that West, who is himself a product of some European educational system, English to be specific, has abandoned some of the more useless forms of that Educational, or should we say theological approaches. Instead, as we have seen above, he has opted without any shame, thankfully to learn from, and adopt the Latin American theology of Liberation at one level, and cautiously support the Black theology of liberation in South Africa on the other, implied by his own discourse.

For the other, the epistemological break he has spoken of here, does not only engender in the Euro-American type of theology deep crisis, but also raptures of thought emerge from the Evangelical-Pentecostal views of God when faced with the charges of irrelevances, learned doubt, and hermeneutics of suspicions from the critical theological views to emerge over some time now from the Third World.

Thirdly, to recognise and appropriate these form of thinking theologically, is at the same time focus on, and critique our own apartheid, and post-apartheid forms of
social reality and theological distortions and hermeneutical bankruptcy, if one may call it that. The words of Allan Boesak has influence me when he wrote:

Theological speaking blacks must take the responsibility and formulate in their own words their belief in God. They can no longer hide behind the theological formulas created by someone else. But moving away from the illusioned universality of Western theology to the contextuality of liberation theology (Boesak 1977:6).

Fourthly the investigation on the history of the Pentecostal Movement in the twentieth century influence myself when I discovered the divide between white and black.

White Pentecostals accepted Parham and not William Seymour as the founder, and Topeka and not Azusa Street as the birthplace of the Pentecostal Movement. When Charles Parham visited Azusa Street he was disturbed by the noisy African-American type of worship and distressed by the fact that black and white mixed so freely and spontaneously.

In the South African context the white, black divide continued within Pentecostalism. De Wet (1989:165) writes as follows on a decision taken on the 7th July 1917 by the Executive Council of the AFM:

… we do not teach or encourage social equality between whites and natives. We recognise that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is acceptable to Him. We therefore preach the gospel equally to all peoples, making no distinctions. We wish it to be generally known that our white coloured and native people have their separate places of worship where the sacraments are administered to them.

This white, black divide created different notions of God. Black Pentecostals were taught such notions of God as creator, Gods providence, Gods attributes, the
Incarnation of God etc., and this was not in vain. But the black thinking, black experience of God was suppressed. Black Pentecostals experience God differently in their black context.

Therefore this study grew out of the desire to investigate the way in which God is spoken of in a Black-South African Pentecostal context. The white/black divide within Pentecostalism contributed to a partial understanding on the notions of God. The white/black divide gave us a one sided understanding on the notions of God. The Western, American idea on the notions of God was overemphasise against the Black Pentecostal experience. As Black Pentecostals we have seldom been allowed to think for ourselves. We have put up with a kind of theological imperialism as non-westerners we stuck rigidly to the previous formula of Western scholasticism and were not considered theologians, or bright enough to communicate the gospel. This dissertation is an effort to prove this statement wrong and prove that black people experience God differently in their own contemporary situation. This is, undeniably a question of method, as to how that is so.

1.4. METHODOLOGY

The approach in this study will be mainly to investigate the notions of God in Crystal Tabernacle with the aim of throwing more light on the subject. The method of investigation is by way of a review of the relevant literature on the doctrine of God within the framework of the chapter headings of this dissertation. The goal is primarily to accurately summarise and describe what was written on the doctrine of God relating to the chapter headings. I am also doing an observation within Crystal Tabernacle on how God’s people express themselves in preaching, song, dancing and testimony to their God, which is also my God.

1.4.1. Participant Observer

In our attempt to get a clearer perspective of “notions of God in Crystal Tabernacle”, I spent one year as a participant at Crystal Tabernacle. This meant participating in
numerous church services, crusades, prayer meetings and cell groups processes. I sang, prayed and danced with my brothers and sisters.

I paid special attention to the sermons, the songs, prayers, and testimonies in an effort to understand how Crystal Tabernacle congregants express themselves to God, and how they understand notions of God.

I have used some of the songs and sayings of Crystal Tabernacle to illustrate how God is experienced in that context of Crystal Tabernacle.

1.4.2. Comparative Approach

There are two authors who make sense when dealing with Crystal Tabernacle from a critical, and Pentecostal/Charismatic point of view, raising and studying the notions of God therein, which, as already could be gathered, directly from this my research work, Black theology of the Poor and the Oppressed is what informs the perspective, towards an analysis and synthesis of the notions of God, at the Crystal Tabernacle.

1.5. LITERATURE REVIEW

I have already made reference to some of the scholars who have researched theology and critically reflect upon the way people of a particular religious tradition live out their faith. However at this point, it may prove useful to look more closely at their arguments, especially as they relate to what will follow.

1.5.1. Traditional concepts of God

Myer Pearlman (1937) is known among Pentecostals traditionally to be the scholar who wrote an notions of God. Pearlman begins with the existence of God and cover such aspects as the works of God, the names of God, the attributes of God etc.
Henry Thiessen is another Pentecostal writer on the subject of God. Thiessen points out the importance of language. He notes that humanity communicate with each other through language, which includes concepts and symbols. Every language has a concept for deity because all peoples believe in the supernatural. Thiessen (1979:23) writes:

Language, too, has its rights and terms that have been long used to convey a certain specific meaning cannot rightly be appropriated to express an entirely different meaning.

One cannot ignore the traditional and early teachings on concepts of God. As previously stated “theology is a product”, concepts of God from the early church fathers and the inherited tradition cannot be discarded.

1.5.2. James Cone and Allan Boesak

All serious theologians know that to speak of Black theology is at the same time to interact with the chief interlocutor of Black theology and Black power especially in context of the United States of America, name Professor James Cone, in our own context of church struggles, Allan Boesak cannot be ignored, despite the fact he spoke Black, but drifted much more to the position of the Charterist non-racialism. In fact it is also important for that very reason not to ignore Boesak.

Additionally, Boesak, a “coloured” theologian, speaks eloquently of the condition of the Poor, the God of the Poor and the responsibility of the Church.

(i) Black Pentecostal Theology of the Poor, and the Oppressed “Coloured” as realistically heuristic device, in Crystal Tabernacle Congregational ministries.

(ii) At some points, in terms of the theological language, objects of ideological criticisms, Boesak and Cone share quite a lot, and for that matter, one cannot
fail to notice that there are areas where Boesak seemed to have depended on Cone. Yet, on the other hand, Boesak is contextual creative so far as the South African conditions are concerned, with regards Black people in general and the coloured people in particular.

(iii) It is should, as it might have become obvious now that some authorities in various fields related to the subject at hand have been extensively, and freely used in so far as these offer some enlightening comments, or research leads, *inter alia*.

(iv) A contextual theological approach, even as the emphasis is on the Black Theology of liberation for the Poor and the Oppressed, is used sparingly with some caution, especially after Mosala’s criticism of pretending to be an innocent enterprise, which is held in constancy as it is simultaneously applied to various contexts whereas itself does not change.

It is clear that Crystal Tabernacle is predominantly coloured in appearance, black in its political and ideological orientation. Dr Allan Boesak himself has in fact, over time interact with the Congregation there, to a point where during the 2002 10 years Celebrations, he offered congratulatory words!

All that does not of course nullify the fact that a number of other theologians, social science scholars are used here necessary in the process of this work: Gustavo Gutierrez, Takatso Mofokeng, Rosemary Ruether, Mary Daly, Harvey Cox, Bonganjalo Goba, Gerald West, cited freely, among others, etc., etc.

Also, the comments based upon the Preachings of Pastor Carl Hendricks himself, the Church’s (Crystal Tabernacle Ministries’) Songs of Praise should be expected in the process of discourse.

1.6. AIM OF STUDY
The research will be undertaken:

(i) Primarily to describe what Crystal Tabernacle congregants understand of the doctrine of God. I hope to make a modest contribution to the growing contribution concerning “notions of God” and the role and meaning thereof for our times.

My aim throughout, really is to make the notions of God in Crystal Tabernacle accessible and understandable in this particular context.

This dissertation of limited scope seeks to present an analysis and interpretation that will contribute not only to the larger body of research in these areas, but will make “notions of God” comprehensible, especially to my own community of Black, (could be read for the purposes of this study, Coloured) sisters and brothers in the Faith, grappling with the issues of God, in context Worship, Preaching and social action.

(ii) To test the authenticity of our faith and to make a contribution to the doctrine of God within a particular context.

Gustavo Gutierrez (1988:9) says it as follows:

The church must deal with the real questions of the modern world and attempt to respond to them, … it must open as it were a new chapter of theological –pastoral epistemology. Instead of using only revelation and tradition as starting points, as classical theology has generally done, it must start with facts and questions derived from the world and from history.

What this implies therefore is that should avoid, as much as is possible, without harming its imperative Gospel ministry which present, not incorrectly, Christ as the answer, the tendency of the traditional church model, as Father
Lebamang Sebidi has observed, wryly that the Church is like a man who has a bag full of answers, who goes about scattering as it were these answers, where there are no questions asked.

(iii) To prove that the doctrine of God can be applied in a contemporary situation without corruption. With that my hope is of course that this dissertation could assist us with a contemporary self-understanding and self-critique and perhaps give guidance in the midst of strategic decisions being made at this stage of our development, a crossroads in our moment in history.

(iv) To recognise that theology is not static but dynamic.

1.7. BIAS

Kretzhmar (1982:23) comments that, “while it is doubtful whether it is possible, or even desirable to abstract oneself from one's social and theological background, it is important to be aware of it in order to guard against excessive and unavoidable prejudice”.

The writer acknowledges that he is a 46 year old, Black, English/Afrikaans speaking South African male, reared in a moderately liberal atmosphere. While I try to avoid tidy theological labels, I would probably be classified as a slightly left wing Pentecostal. I have tried to remain aware of my context and not let it blur my objectivity. A certain amount of bias has, however probably been unavoidable. Rather then lamenting unduly, the possibility of its existence should be noted.

1.8. DIVISION OF CHAPTERS

Chapter One provides the introductory remarks, orientation and a literature survey and describes the methodological approach that will be followed in achieving the aim of the study. Chapter Two provides conceptual; clarification, in terms of which the Crystal Tabernacles History, Theology and activities should read and in the light of
which it should be interpreted. Chapter Three covers the inherited notions of God for the simple reason that Crystal Tabernacle traditionally originates from the Pentecostal movement. Chapter Four covers the aspect of the oppression of the “coloured” persons, the poor and who they are, and the notions of God experienced in this context. Chapter Five reviews, summarises and concludes the study.
CHAPTER TWO
CRYSTAL TABERNACLE

2.1. INTRODUCTION

The Theology, history and experiences of the Crystal Tabernacle in Eldorado Park, could be stated without any fear of serious contradiction that it is at the same time the history, theology and tradition of the world Pentecostal movement, or at least, one could say this differently that the Crystal Tabernacle Ministries as Church – stand within the tradition of the Charismatic-Pentecostal Movement.

The congregants at Crystal Tabernacle experienced oppression, marginalisation, discrimination and subjugation in its severest form.

2.2. HISTORY AND THEOLOGY OF THE PENTECOSTAL MOVEMENT

Any and most Churches or church Denominations trace theological Confessions, Traditions and Ecclesiastical Structure to what they see in the Bible, depending, most of the time, upon the social location and ideological orientation these may be at when they read the Scriptures.

I for one, am of the opinion that the very first historical record of Pentecostalism can be traced to Acts Chapter Two. Acts 2:1-4 states as follows:

   And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.
Erling Jorstad (1973:9) wrote about this day as follows:

On that day God revealed God’s will directly to man for the first time since the ascension of Jesus; hence the directions and the powers given to the disciples on that day represent the oldest and thus the most authoritative understanding of the will of God ever revealed to man. God proved visibly through the powers he poured out through the Holy Spirit on the disciples what he intended subsequent generations of Christians to believe. Thus Pentecostals they must allow the events at Pentecost to guide their every activity as they carry on God’s work at present.

In connection with the above-noted set of experiences, revelations and their meaning, in that of Pentecost, it must however be borne in mind that historians have tended to place the date for the appearance of Pentecostalism at about 1900, despite the fact that the Pentecostal theological movement itself, claims scriptural origins, which thereby locates the beginnings of Pentecostalism in the first century, A.D./A.C.E.

The Pentecostal movement can be traced to the “Azusa Street Mission” between 1906 and 1909 in an old building at 312 Azusa Street. A group of black people met under the leadership of William Seymour. There were special manifestations of the spirit, many people were saved and healed and many received the baptism in the Spirit with the accompanying of tongues. This we call in the Pentecostal circles a direct experience of God.

Through the activity of the Holy Spirit who is not less than God or a “demi god” one can experience God directly. God is the Holy Spirit present in the service. God is real in the midst of Crystal Tabernacle believers and they experience Gods power, God is not above us, but in front of us and next to us; God is not from us, but working within us. Morton Kelsey (1972:36) writes about the Pentecostals as follows:
The basic tenant of Pentecostal faith is that the supernatural experiences described in the New Testament can also happen in the same way in our time. They believe men today can have direct contact with the Spirit of God just as the apostles experience it, and they find this happening in visions, healing, prophesy, tongues and in dealing with the demonic.

Harvey Cox (1995:3-6) writes on the direct experience of God as follows:

It seemed that the ancient curse of Babel, the confounding of languages, had been reversed and that God was creating a new inclusive human community in which “Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia” could all live together … It is about the experience of God, and it depicts a God who does not remain aloof but reaches down through the power of the Spirit to touch human hearts in the midst of life’s turmoil.

Cecilia Loreto Mariz (1994:137) writes on the direct experience of God as follows:

The possibilities that ordinary people can be in touch with the supernatural world is a characteristic of almost all religions that are popular among the poor. The belief that any participant in a religious organisation can deal directly with God fosters the development of a lay leadership and the development of small, autonomous groups. This belief also increases the self-esteem.

2.2.1. Pentecostalism in the 20th Century

On New Year’s Eve, or on the very first day (New Year’s Day) of the year, in the year 1900 at Bethel Bible College students gathered for a traditional Watch Night Service.
A student Agnes Ozman asked that they lay hands on her so as to receive the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Parham laid his hands on her and God baptised her, accordingly, with/in the Holy Spirit.

Dr Japie Lapoorta (1996:25-34) refers to three views on the origin of the Pentecostal Movement. The first view portrays Charles Parham as the founder. Parham was the founder of the Topeka Bible School. At this school Parham assigned the students to search for the biblical evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. These students came up with proof that when people were baptised in the Holy Spirit, the undisputable proof on each occasion was that they spoke in tongues. Secondly there was the view that the Pentecostal Movement originated supernaturally without any human leader. This view was promulgated by Carl Brumback who vehemently rejected the black roots. His argument was that the outpouring of the twentieth century did not begin in a black alley mission but in a mansion. Brumback further argued that the origins of the Pentecostal Movement are to be found in the Holy Spirit and not in any human leader. To me this was a discriminatory statement. For the mere fact that Charles F Parham was a convinced follower of the Ku Klux Klan (Hollenweger 1974:19), I accept the third view on the origins of the Pentecostal Movement. The third view refers to William Joseph Seymour as the founder of the movement at 312 Azusa Street. Seymour was instrumental at 312 Azusa Street. God’s anointing filled this place. All classes, races and sexes mingled at Azusa Street. Havey Cox (1995:96) wrote as follows about Seymour:

… it is impossible to understand pentecostalisms origin without the story of one particular man. William Joseph Seymour, a black preacher born in 1870 of parents who were former slaves in Centreville, Louisiana …

Leonard Lovett (1975:97) writes on the black origins as follows:

… black Pentecostalism emerged out of the context of the brokenness of black existence.
John G Lake and Thomas Hezmalhalch became the first missionaries to South Africa. The Pentecostal Movement produced great Godly man like Elias Letwaba, Edward Motaung, Nicholas Bhengu, Richard Ngidi, Frank Chikane etc. It is my opinion that recently God raised up man like Freddy Edwards (JCC), Anthony Constance (Ubuntu Family Church), Dan Colbert (PPC), Carl Hendricks (Crystal Tabernacle) and others as the fourth generation of Pentecostals in South Africa.

2.3. **CRYSTAL TABERNACLE: FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS**

The history of Crystal Tabernacle is far more than a documented account of the origin and growth of a religious organisation. It is a record of a truly Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit and of its consequence.

2.3.1. **History of Crystal Tabernacle**

In 1992 led by the Holy Spirit, Pastors Carl and Joan Hendricks founded Crystal Tabernacle. This church is situated to the South of Johannesburg a “coloured” area called Eldorado Park. Pastors Carl and Joan’s house served as worship centre beginning with eight members. Their vision was to build a house of God that would bring hope to the disadvantaged community. Their mission was to root this vision in a ministry that responded on a practical level, to the daily needs and priorities of the poor and marginalized. Carl and Joan Hendricks pledge to work, through the words and deeds of Crystal, for the spiritual, political and economic emancipation and empowerment of their people.

In August 1992 services were held in a classroom at Kliptown High School. During 1993 Kliptown High was too small to house the congregants. With God’s intervention and answering to prayers God supplied land of 3000m square. During 1994 the first annual Conference known today as “Under African Skies” was born into the ministry. This was also the year the Cell Church was introduced to the community. The year 1995 saw the congregation growing to 300 in total. Ministries such as Youth – and Ladies Ministries grew from strength to strength. Events such as
annual conferences and out-reach campaigns and crusades brought more and more converts into the Crystal family. The year 1996/97 saw the erection of the present day structure. In the year 2000 Crystal Ministries ordained 15 Pastors into the ministry. The congregation grew to 1000 in this year. Presently Crystal Ministries have four services every Sunday. At the time of this writing its membership consists of 4000 members. Crystal Tabernacle believes it is God who creates the waves of Church growth and one has to surf the Spiritual waves God creates Isaiah 51:15 states:

I am the Lord thy God that divided the sea, whose waves roared: The Lord of hosts is his name.

This Church is sensitive towards the “gifts of the Spirit” and is active in prophetic and healing practices. The Spirit is an important factor but rationality is not subjected to nothingness.

The eagle is the logo that Crystal Tabernacle adopted. The eagle is one of the most gracious, alert and agile birds created by God which embodies in a very profound way those characteristics and qualities. The birds elegance and dignity calls for admiration and awe and its strength and authority demands respect and obedience. Carried on its mighty wings, the eagle soars high in the African Skies, a symbol of excellence, superiority and dominance. So too Crystal Tabernacle has soared and will continue to rise higher and higher, carried on the powerful wings of the Holy Spirit inspired by the love and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ and guided by the will of God.

2.3.2. Crystal Tabernacle’s statement of faith

Crystal Tabernacle believe that the Bible is the sole and final authority for all matters of faith and conduct (Hendricks 2002:16). One of the outstanding features of the ministry for me is the proclamation its congregants recite before the preaching of Gods word, this proclamation originated at Lake Wood, Texas and was introduced by John Osteen. During Pastor Carl Hendricks visit to this church he heard this being recited as follows:
This is my Bible.
I am what it says I am.
I have what it says I have.
I can do what it says I can do.
Today I will be taught the Word of God.
I boldly confess.
My mind is alert, my heart is receptive.
I will never be the same.
I’m about to receive the indestructible
The ever living seed of the Word of God.
I will never, never, never, never, never
Be the same again in Jesus name.

From this statement important Pentecostal theology arises. In Pentecostal theology the Bible is regarded as the “full inspiration” of Scripture. Inspiration refers to the spiritual influence – the power of the Holy Spirit – which came upon the writers of Scripture, enabling them to record God’s message with complete accuracy. The theory of inspiration that Crystal Tabernacle adopted is Plenary inspiration. Plenary inspiration means that all Scripture is equally “God breathed”. It base its claim on 2 Timothy 3:16. This means that God inspired the writers, and they recorded faithfully the message they received. In this process God did not bypass human intellect. God gave freedom to the writers to express the inspired message in their own vocabulary, style and cultural framework.

The expression “I will never be the same again” has some significant truth. It is not just a saying but it is reality. Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10:17). Preachers at Crystal Tabernacle acknowledge that they are only the instruments of God’s word and God is the one that change the person or situation Jerobeam Koert had this to say after his conversion; “I lived as a gangster and criminal for 21 years, but when God touched me my life has never been the same”.
Furthermore Crystal Tabernacle believes in:

The Eternal Godhead who has revealed Himself as one God existing in three persons. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, distinguishable but indivisible.

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of humanity, conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary. True God and True humanity.

Jesus Christ died for our sins, battled with Satan, overcame Satan and rose again on the third day.

The bodily ascension of Jesus to heaven, His exaltation and the personal literal and bodily coming again the second time for His Church.

The salvation of sinners by grace, through repentance and faith in perfect and sufficient work of the cross on Calvary, by which we obtain remission of sins.

The necessity of water baptism by immersion in the Name of the Eternal Godhead, in order to fulfil the command of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit as a real experience at or subsequent to salvation.

The operation of the gifts of the Spirit.

The table of the Lord – Communion of the Lord’s Supper – for believers.

The reality and personality of Satan and eternal judgement in the Lake of fire.

Eternal life for believers and eternal punishment for unbelievers.
There is one true universal Church, made up of genuine believers, composed of many local Churches, all under the sovereign Headship of the Lord Jesus Christ. That God created humanity in His image, as man and woman to be equals in their own unique functions, to live in spiritual and sexual purity.

There can be no doubt that the Statement of Faith at the Crystal Tabernacle is consistent with the Apostolic traditions whether these are interpreted in Ecumenical light of Protestant Christianity, or it is taken over by specifically evangelistic forms of Pentecostalism.

Furthermore, it is definitely unmistakable that the Crystal Tabernacle is deeply Christian, Charismatic in its expression of the same Faith. These have included practical social interventions with regards to infirmities, diseases, and other types of physical and psychological and spiritual needs in our Community at Eldorado Park – as Faith without works is dead!

2.3.3. Crystal Tabernacle’s Activities

Crystal Tabernacle’s mission is not only to prepare people for heaven. Therefore their question is not only, is there life after death? But also is there life before death. In the words of pastor Carl Hendricks on a sermon he preach dated 6th April 2003 he said, “people are more important than paper”. Community Service is on the priority list. They are working for the social and material upliftment and empowerment of the weakest of the weak and poorest of the poor in Eldorado Park. Its community programme includes a food programme bringing relief to those without bread on the table. Special care to the elderly to ensure that they remain nurtured; cherished and to prevent their isolation and stagnation. Crystal Community Service’s mission is to penetrate and impact society positively by influencing families with a passion for Jesus Christ and a vision for a better way of life.

Crystal Creative Arts is an expression of appreciation for the value and importance of identifying and developing the artistic, cultural talent of its members. Much of the
spirituality, energy and colour of the packed services in the auditorium every Sunday, as well as special events, are the result of the music districts creativity and vigour. The drama and painting programme – as is the case with the music department – has over many years helped people to discover and develop talents that they themselves were not even aware of. Central to Crystal Creative Arts is the praise and worship ministry. Under the leadership of Pastor Lester Constance the praise and worship team consist of a choir of eighty people, a professional band of seven, a worship team of six and more than fifty Spiritual dancers. Crystal Tabernacle is a musical Church. Music is an integral part of its service. Believers at Crystal eat with it, shop with it, relax with it and even dance to it. Their music is a celebration; its style is upbeat, bright and joyful.

At the helm of Evangelism are Evangelist Eden Constance and his wife Zenia. They take the gospel to the bedridden in hospitals, incarcerated in prison, those forgotten in Old Aged Homes and those human beings who live in hospices for AIDS sufferers. Evangelism is part of the Great Commission, to win the lost at any cost. One of Crystal’s strongest characteristics is its far-reaching crusades in both Gauteng and elsewhere. These visits and tent crusades serve to revive believer’s commitment to God and always result in spiritual upliftment and renewed growth. Every crusade sees new converts turning to the Lord through the preaching of God’s word. The Evangelistic teams strength is its tent crusades and open air gatherings. Other activities are their logistical services, Adult Ministries, Ladies Ministries, Children’s Ministries and Youth Ministry.

Crystal Tabernacle’s vision statement is as follows:

Dream big
Establish strong families and communities
Seek social justice
Train and equip leaders
Introduce others to Christ
Navigate nation building
Yoke yourself to Christ

Social justice on the other hand calls for, *inter alia*, the structures that are build to bear the vision of the sovereign Reign/Rule/Kingdom of God – where equality, care, compassion and freedom are the hallmarks of the values-system.

In addition to that, justice does reflect critically, the spotlight on the political arrangements in the light of the condition of the poor, tilted towards, hopefully the economic justice ethic – the doing of justice, coloured by mercy. A church, Pentecostal or not, perhaps, is supposed to be looked at prophetic in its ecclesiology, which by the current reading of the Crystal Tabernacle, the latter should not, and cannot be dismissed as irrelevant to the needs of the community within which its members worship.

This is to say that the God who is directly experienced in Pentecostal Church worship is represented in turn, directly to the community at large, including critical proclamation if needs be.

One of the examples of the Pastor’s prophetic criticism of racism, black oppression including personal encounters of social evils is the Mr Hendricks Senior’s recounted story. In a sermon preached by Pastor Carl Hendricks on the 4th April 2004, he related an incident that occurred with his father. Mr Hendricks Senior had a mechanical problem with his car during the early seventies.

The white technician was called out to do the repairs. After the technician removed the oil filter he poured “white horse whisky” into the oil filter mixed with oil and gave it to Mr Hendricks Senior to drink. Mr Hendricks refused, as any black person with some dignity still left in him/her would have done, under every trying circumstances, obviously, nevertheless.

Then the white man remarked offensively: “*daar is geen boesman wat nie drink nie!”* (There is no coloured that does not drink! – beer/intoxicating liquor or
beverage, that is!). Obviously that is how white oppressors value (should we not say de-value) coloured people.

2.4. ANALYSIS

Crystal Tabernacle is a “Social Conscience Church”. Warren (1995:124) explains this type of church as follows:

It is prophetic and reformative. It is there to change society. It is full of activists who are “doers of the word”, and comes in both a liberal and conservative version. The liberal focus on our injustice in our society, the conservative focus on the moral decline of our society … Important terms are needs, serve, share, minister take a stand and do something.

At Crystal Tabernacle God reveals himself and enter into fellowship with its congregants. God is not a distant and cold deity. What distinguishes this church movement from other movements is that one experience God directly. God is not “too remote” and excluded from human affairs. God is the transcendance God and also the condensation God. God’s duality is both “surpassing” and “stooping down”. God is the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity and dwells in the high and holy place yet God is with those of a humble spirit to revive the spirit of the humble (Isaiah 57:15). Crystal Tabernacle can be classified as the “experiencing God church”. Key words in this church are praise, prayer, worship, music, spiritual gifts, spirit power and revival.

At Crystal man and woman experience God directly. Lives are being transformed through the blood of Jesus Christ, broken marriages are being mended, God is the one who lifts people up out of poverty, God heals, and God gives breakthroughs.

God is experienced in the Adult district, woman’s gathering, youth and all other departments. Crystal Tabernacle believers belief that the outpouring of the Spirit
according to Acts 2:1-4, the giving of ministerial gifts according to Ephesians 4:11-13 and Romans 12, the giving of spiritual gifts according to 1 Corinthians 12 is a direct experience of God. God supernaturally communicates with His people. Although we engage in the gifts, it is God who speaks and makes His message known. Crystal agrees with the words of Morton Kelsey when he says; “The church must provide an experience base, which individuals can know and build on, or they will look elsewhere for this base” (Kelsey 1972:215). Crystal Tabernacle also identifies with Augustine who saw God as, the one who in love stoops down to man. Augustine’s emphasis was “humilitas Christi”, which is the “humilitas of God” himself (Berkhof 1979:117).

At Crystal Tabernacle, the services are designed to provide a context for a mystical encounter, an experience with the divine. The primary rites of worship, praise and altar response are particularly structured to sensitise the congregants to the presence of the divine and to stimulate a conscious experience of God. When a worship leader says: “let’s enter into the presence of the Lord”, it is not heard as mere rhetoric. The congregation expects to have a keen awareness of the divine presence.

Crystal congregants experience God as empowering and commissioning. In the manifestation of the power of God, God proves God’s interest in the affairs of human kind in specific ways. The experiences of power reflect very personal experiences, an individual experiencing a personal God.

2.5. CONCLUSION

Pentecostalism is Biblical, it was in God’s mind, prophesy predicted its origin, its particle fulfilment was in Acts chapter two. The Azusa Street experience was a re-awakening in the 20th Century. Pentecostalism lives on in Crystal Tabernacle. We appreciate the coming of John G Lake and Thomas Hezmalhalch as missionaries to Africa. But I boldly state before their coming God did not leave Africa without a witness. Pentecostalism originated out of humble beginnings.
Human beings can experience God directly. However, all experiences must be tested against scripture. God is not a “Deus absconditus” at Crystal Tabernacle. God is not independent of the human situation. God is not aloof and distant. God is not detached, remote, dispassionate, uninvolved or neutral (Konig 1982:92). God is not an absentee landlord (Macquarrie 1977:239). Humanity can and do have experience of God in the here and now (Kelsey 1972:9). Where the Spirit of God is there we experience God directly through oppression and poverty God has been with Gods people. God can change any situation anytime. At Crystal Tabernacle one does not experience a distant and cold deity. Jesus is alive and interactive among the congregants. God answers prayer, God performs miracles, God intervenes and provides. There is a direct contact with the Spirit of God just as the apostles experienced it. It is the Spirit of God that makes the direct experience of God possible.

At Crystal Tabernacle God is experienced in leadership, in worship, in the word, in the gifts and ministry. Congregants “hear” from God, “speak to God”, are being “touched by God”, and “meet God”.
CHAPTER THREE
INHERITED NOTIONS OF GOD

3.1. INTRODUCTION

Considering the historical information on Crystal Tabernacle in Chapter Two one can draw numerous concepts of God. In this chapter my aim is to concentrate on the “inherited Pentecostal” notions of God. Crystal Tabernacle originated from a traditional Pentecostal context and this context influence its understanding on the doctrine of God. It is Hill, Knitter and Madges (1995:251) that refers to theology as a “product”; it is an inherited religious tradition of a collection of traditional beliefs, rules and practices. I do not want to contradict myself with the chapter that will follow. But to consider one of Henry Newman’s tests in this chapter for a true development of doctrine Newman’s first and foremost test of true development of doctrine is, “the preservation of the idea or type”. His argument is the essence of a philosophical or political system must be preserved as it meets changing circumstances or it can be said that corruption has occurred. For example, if the members of a monastic institution abandon their vows than the institution has not preserved the type. Newman’s explanation is illustrated as follows: an animal has the same make as it had on its birth; young birds do not grow into fishes, nor does the child degenerate into an animal (Toon 1979:1-16).

Therefore one cannot ignore the inherited notions of God from the Pentecostal background. If Crystal Tabernacle ignores this tradition than it lost its Pentecostal tradition, and has not preserve the idea or type. This inherited notions of God comes out strong in its statement of faith, the songs that are being sung and activities.

3.2. BIBLICAL NOTIONS OF GOD

From Crystal Tabernacles statement of faith one can conclude that this church belief in the plenary inspiration of Scripture. Therefore Scripture is an important source for notions of God.
The biblical names of God carry great significance. Pentecostals because they are biblical and practical people, can speak strongly and convincingly of the reality of God. They know from the Bible and experience about the willingness of God to relate to His creatures, to become flesh and even die. We have been taught inherited notions of God who does not choose to exit in grand isolation as an unconditioned, unmoved mover but who has sovereignly decided to have a real relationship with human beings relationships that even impact on and condition them. We inherited an understanding about a God of divine human relations in which God responds to us and does things because we ask Him to do them, in which God allows Himself to be conditioned by human beings in some respects, and in which God decides to act as a result of being asked by human beings.

3.2.1 ELOHIM (translated “GOD”)

One of the most widely used terms for God is El with its derivations Elim, Elohim or Eloah. It is similar to the Greek theos, the Latin Deus, and the English God. It is a general word to indicate deity, and is used to include all members of the class of deity. The plural Elohim is used regularly by the Old Testament writers with singular verbs and adjectives to denote a singular idea. The compound El-Elyon designates God as the highest, the most high (Psalm 78:35), and El-Shaddai as the Almighty God (Gen 17:1). This word is employed wherever the creative power and omnipotence of God are described or implied. Elohim is the Creator- God. The plural form signifies fullness of power and foreshadows the trinity. The name Elohim means “to worship”. God is the worshipped one. God is the only object of true worship, praise, adoration and trust. We worship One God who is three distinct Persons in One glorious Being, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

During the patriarchal period Abraham knew and used the names Elohim (Genesis 17:7). Additional names were revealed to Abraham referring to the God of the testament. In Genesis 14:18 the name “El Elyon” which means “God most high” were revealed. In Genesis 17:1 the word “El Shaddai” which means “God almighty” were
revealed. In these names for God, God’s sovereign power is seen as providing humanity with the basic assurance that is needed for practical living.

3.2.2 JEHOVAH (translated “LORD” in our version)

Elohim, the Creator- God, does not stand aloof from human beings. Seeing their need God came down to help and save human beings, in assuring this relationship God reveals Himself as Jehovah, the covenant God.

The word “Jehovah” means “Saviour” or “Deliverer” (Exodus 6:3). God in Christ is God mighty to save; Jehovah essentially means “to be”. And our Lord Jesus Christ declares that He is the one “which is, which was, and which is to come” (Revelation 1:4). This notion of God tells us that God is the self existent One.

Jehovah or Yahweh is the personal name par excellence for God. The term is connected with the Hebrew verb “to be”, and means the “self existent one”, or the “one who causes to be” (Exodus 6:2; 3:13-16). This name is often translated into English as “Lord”.

Massyoshi (1980: 54) comments on this name as follows:

The ancient Jews held this name of God in high regard. Lest they should violate the command of Leviticus 24:16… They developed two practices…

The ancient Jewish Scripture had to be copied by hand. The report is that when a copyist would come to the name Jehovah (Lord in our Bibles) he would stop working and bathe himself completely. Taking a brand-new quill when the name was completed. Before resuming his work he would bathe again.

The second practice… accounts for the origin of the word Jehovah. Hesitating to pronounce the name for the reason mentioned above public readers would pronounce the Hebrew name for “Master” instead. They would read God’s personal name, but pronounce the substitute word “Master”. This has resulted in the loss of the exact spelling
and pronunciation of the original name and has produced our word Jehovah, which consists of the consonants of God’s personal name together with the vowels of the Hebrew word for master.

This name Jehovah occurs in a number of significant combinations:

Jehovah-Jireh, the Lord that provide (Gen 22:14);
Jehovah-Rapha, the Lord that heals (Exod 15:26);
Jehovah-Nissi, the Lord our banner (Exod 17:15);
Jehovah-Shalom, the Lord our peace (Juda 6:24);
Jehovah-Raoh, the Lord our righteousness (Jer 23:6); and
Jehovah-Shammah, the Lord is present (Ezek 48:35).

3.2.3 GOD AS SPIRIT

In John 4:24 the writer of this gospel refers to God as “Spirit”. God is indeed Spirit. When Moses was on Mount Sinai, he said that he saw no form. In fact Moses came from the mountain with the Law which said that humanity should not try to represent God by any image. When we refer to God as Spirit, it means that God is love, God is intelligence. Love and intelligence have no shape. These are spiritual things. We cannot draw a picture of God or make an image of God.

God is a Spirit with personality; God thinks, feels, speaks, and therefore can have direct communion with His creatures made in His image. As a Spirit God are not subject to the limitations to which possession of body subjects human beings. God does not possess bodily parts or passions, is not subject to the conditions of natural existence. Hence God cannot be seen with the natural eyes or apprehended by the natural senses. This does not imply that God lives a shadowy, unsubstantial existence. God is a real person, but of so infinite nature that God cannot be fully comprehended by the human mind or adequately described by human language. “No man hath seen God at any time” declares John. (John 1:18). Yet in Exodus 24: 910 we read that Moses and certain elders “saw God”. There is no contradiction; John means that no
man has ever seen God as He is. But we know that spirit may be manifested in bodily form (Matt 3: 16); therefore God can manifest Himself in a way that can be apprehended by man. God also describes His infinite personality in language understood by infinite minds; therefore the Bible speaks of God having hands, arms, eyes, and describes God as seeing, feeling, hearing, repenting and so forth.

3.3. NOTION OF A TRIUNE GOD

Crystal Tabernacle statement of faith state the following: “We believe in the eternal Godhead who has revealed Himself as one God existing in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, distinguishable but indivisible”. (Hendricks 2002:16). From this statement one can conclude not only on God’s unity but God as trinity. Unity and trinity are essential inseparable in the notions of God. God’s unity is unique it is the only unity of the kind.

The Trinity is also unique because it is revealed only in Scripture, and most clearly in the New Testament. The word trinity itself does not occur in the Bible, but the doctrine does. It is a peculiar Christian doctrine based solely on biblical revelation; we do not find it in natural theology.

Firstly this statement of faith in Crystal Tabernacle about the trinity is in accord with the Athanasian Creed. The Athanasian Creed expressed the Trinitarian notion of God as follows: “We worship one God in Trinity, and the Trinity in unity; we distinguish among the persons, but we do not divide the substance”. It goes on to say, “The entire three persons are coeternal and coequal with one another, so that … we worship complete unity in Trinity and Trinity in unity”.

Secondly this statement of faith about the Trinity also recognised Jesus as God, and it is line with the Nicene Creed. The Nicene Creed expression is as follows: “We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of the all things, both visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, only begotten of the Father,
that is to say, of the substance of the Father, God of God and light of Light, very God of very God …”.

Thirdly this statement of faith in Crystal Tabernacle about the trinity recognised the Holy Spirit as God. The Holy Spirit is a person. The Holy Spirit is a divine Person just as Jesus is. In John 14:16 Jesus said: “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever”. The word another in Greek “allos” means another of the same sort. Therefore the words and works of the Holy Spirit are considered as the words and works of God.

3.4 CONCLUSION

Crystal Tabernacle draws its inherited notions of God from its Pentecostal inheritance. Pentecostalism is usually associated with plenary inspiration of Scripture. Therefore the Scriptures are the first source to seek notions of God. Scripture describe many names for God and these names reflect the true notions of God. God’s names are descriptive of God’s activity to establish and fulfil God’s activity of salvation available to all humanity. In Crystal Tabernacle statement of faith one can draw the conclusion of the notion of a Triune God. The term “trinity” means that there are three eternal distinctions in the one divine essence, known respectively as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

These are the basic inherited ideas of notions of God. There are many other inherited notions of God that we inherited. For the sake of this study it can be too lengthy.

Other inherited ideas on the notions of God can be found in the existence of God, the nature of God, the attributes of God, the decrees of God, the works of God etc.

These Biblical names for God, speaks of notions of God of ways that God is united with humanity to help humanity. Further these notions of God proof that God is a being, and it indicates the way in which God is different from other beings. Because
Crystal Tabernacle emphasis is on the Bible one can draw conclusions that God is what the Bible describe God. The Bible is not God but describe notions of God.
CHAPTER FOUR
PREDOMINANT VIEWS ON NOTIONS OF GOD

4.1. INTRODUCTION

In chapter three I concentrate on the “inherited Pentecostal” notions of God. Furthermore I argued Henry Newman’s statement for the test of true development of doctrine, namely “the preservation of the idea or type”. Henry Newman’s argument does not stop at this idea he has another argument for the development of doctrine. This idea he calls, “Preservative additions”. His argument is “a true development may be describe as one which is conservative of the course of development which went before it, which is that development and something besides; it is an addition which illustrates, not obscures, corroborates, not corrects, the body of thought from which it proceeds; and this is its characteristics as contrasted with corruption” (Toon 1979:12). I am of the opinion that the political, social, psychological and contextual circumstance that Crystal Tabernacle congregants find themselves in, ads, illustrates, corroborates the body of though on notions of God.

The inherited notions of God mostly originate from the background of the Pentecostal movement that originate from the United States of America. (See point 2.2).

In this chapter my argument is that within the context of Crystal tabernacle congregants, the inherited notions of God move towards a development of contextual experience of notions of God. Steven Bevans (1998:1) see contextualization as both New and Traditional. His idea is as follows: A contextual approach to theology is a departure from the notion of traditional theology, but at the same time it is very much in continuity with it.

In this chapter one will also notice that the inherited/contextual or contextual/inherited situation and expression of notions of God complement each other. There is a blending between the two. Some of the inherited notions of God again feature under
the heading “Notions of God in Song” (see 4.8). The one cannot disregard the other, early church fathers on the understanding of the doctrine of God cannot be disregarded neither can new concepts (as long as they are in line not to corrupt the original idea) be disregarded.

By creating a picture on the background of the “coloured” people and the circumstances that they found themselves in I hope to bring out the notions of God in their oppressive state and poverty situation.

God takes sides with the oppressed. The God of the oppressed cannot be the same God of the oppressor. A line has got to be divided either God is with the oppressed or God is with the oppressor. Throughout the scriptures God takes sides with the oppressed. God is not distant from those who are oppressed. Allan Anderson (1992:25) writes:

The identification of the origins of the Pentecostal movement with Azusa Street and William Seymour means that Pentecostalism is identified with the poor and oppressed, with non-racialism, and with reconciliation but also with Black leadership, Black power and dignity.

Furthermore my argument is that although some classify us as “coloured” we are black people. It is not strange that some of our people prefer to be identified with “white” people. This is basically because of wrong indoctrination or because of being prejudice towards being black.

God is also with the oppressed woman, woman in their oppression sees God different. Again for woman the God of their oppressors cannot be the God of the oppressed. Jesus is truly the liberator in woman’s experience.

God did not only reveal himself to the Greeks and specifically not only to the Western World. Desmond Tutu (1972:18) writes:
To claim that there were no real religious truths or values in Africa before the Christian era is in effect to say that only in this continent did God remain utterly unknown, since he must surely have revealed himself, say to the Greeks with their passion for truth, goodness and beauty, and to others as well; it is to ignore the testimony of the Bible itself that God nowhere leaves himself without witness. It is really to diminish God as a God who had no dealings with part of his creation. It is to leave unexplained why the Christian Church should mention with pride and sound among its stalwarts men such as Athansius, Augustine of Hippo and to a lesser extent Tertullian and Origen.

4.2. **THE OPPRESSION “COLOURED” PERSONS**

Over time, some political leaders made statements to keep the “coloured” close to them numerous laws were passed to separate and oppress them. The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 and the Immorality Act of 1950 were legislated to ensure that no more “coloureds” were produce. This Act gave the police the right to peep through people’s bedroom windows; people were arrested being naked and endured the humiliation of getting dressed while the police watched. The Population Registration Act of 1950 did much harm to human beings. Simple tests like the “pencil test” were done to people. A pencil was punched into the hair of a victim who was told to shake his head. If the pencil fell out the person was declared “coloured”, and if it remained in the hair the person was declared black. Du Preez (1994:82) refers to the Group Areas Act of 1950 as the most humiliating and most depriving. It was a law that create hatred and bitterness, it was legalized robbery, it was a law forcing people from the cities into townships. This law stole the land from its rightful owners. The Separate Amenities Act of 1953 reserved amenities such as parks, beaches, toilets, elevators, holiday resorts, swimming pools etc for exclusive use of whites. There were no resting, sleeping and eating facilities for non-white travellers. These and many other laws were promulgated in order to oppress other race groups that were not from European origin. All this were done in the name of God. The Nationalist Party Government professes to be Christian and sent by God to
oppress the nations of South Africa. Roy H du Pré (1994:50) writes on the prejudice and racism of “coloured” people:

Even though God made all men equal and the law insist that people are equal, white South Africans, English and Afrikaans speaking alike, have over the years devised ways and means, and spent their time and energies finding methods to circumvent what God and the law tried to do.

4.2.1. Reason for “Coloured” being Black

As the writer of this dissertation I have found myself historically being termed “coloured”. I do identify myself with our people, but I also argue the fact that we are African, indigenous and black. Firstly we are black because we identify with our heritage geographically. We are proudly South African. Europeans often refers to Africa as the black or Dark Continent. If we are from Africa then we must be black. We need not be ashamed of Africa. It was the Kenite African Jethro that taught Moses the oracular method for discerning Yahweh’s will for difficult cases and also instructed Moses in the sacrificial system (Exodus 18). African cities like Alexandria, Carthage and Hippo become Christian centres known for their academic deliberations on the Bible. Secondly we are black because of the identification on the basis of common oppression. Usry and Keener (1996:83) states this idea as follows:

Black consciousness in South Africa analysed the political situation in terms of race, but meant this racial perspective not in an ethnographic sense but in the sense that the oppressed group in South Africa was black.

Desmond Tutu states this idea as follows:

… In South Africa, black is not just a skin colour, for we know blacks who have joined the ranks of our oppressors. Black is also a condition, a condition of being the victim of racial oppression, injustice and
exploitation or one who, whatever their actual skin colour, have thrown in their lot and identified in solidarity with blacks (Battle 1997:11).

In the Star dated 30 April 2003, Business report Eunice Maleka wrote a poem entitled, “I am an African and we identify with it”. She wrote:

… Colonial masters came mercilessly
They milked Africa cows.
Inhumanity enslaved my ancestors
But my African pride refused
To be capitulated to the demands of East and West …
Martin Luther King Junior was an African
Malcolm X was an African
Nelson Mandela is an African
I, also, am an African.

Thirdly the term “black” has become popular when describing ‘non-whites’. Fourthly we were deprived, degraded, humiliated, stripped of human dignity, denied human rights, classified as second class, given a future of hopelessness; this makes us black. We were degraded by being racially labelled. We were outcasts and oppressed in the land of our birth. Allan Anderson (1992:78) writes:

Most “Coloureds” and “Indians” in South Africa consider themselves Black; and they identify with and participate in their freedom struggle.

It is for this reason that I considered the term “A Black South African perspective” appropriate for this dissertation. Usry and Keener (1996:12) writes on a “black perspective” as follows:

A Black perspective means an African perspective, a perspective based on skin tone or a perspective based on shared history of being enslaved and oppressed.
4.2.2. Scripture and Oppression

Scripture detest oppression. Amos the prophet thundered against the injustice with the word of the Lord. Amos 2:6 states:

For three sins of Israel and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes.

Amos also gives a critique of religion when religion is used to sanctify unjust power and ignore an agenda for justice. Amos 5:18-24 states:

Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord! To what end is it for you? The day of the Lord is darkness, and not light. As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him. Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness and not light? Even very dark, and not brightness in it? I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take though away from me the noise of thy songs: for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgement run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.

When Amos prophesied these prophesies Amos was not favourably received by the comfortable establishment; the high priests denounced Amos and suggested that he leave town. Amos responded by crying judgement against the high priests. Amos 7:16-17 states:

… hear the word of the Lord: Thou sayest, prophesy not against Israel, and drop not thy word against the house of Isaac. Therefore thus saith the Lord; Thy wife shall be an harlot in the city, and thy sons and thy
daughters shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided by line; and thou shalt die in a polluted land: and Israel shall surely go into captivity forth of his land.

God's prophets spoke for justice, at times their prophesy put their lives in danger. Jeremiah was thrown into a well and left to die; he was rescued by a foreigner from Nubian Africa (Jeremiah 38:1-13). What was Jeremiah's crime?

To defend the rights of the distress and poor … Isn’t that what it means to know God? (Jeremiah 22:16)

Isaiah, and other prophets said that the true sacrifice God requires of us is justice for the oppressed and compassion for the broken. Isaiah 1:10-17 states:

Hear the word of the Lord … Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is indignity even the solemn meeting, … when ye spread forth your hands, I will hid mine eyes from your: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean: put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil: Learn to do well; seek judgement, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, and plead for the widow.

Isaiah 58:6-7 states:

Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?
Exodus 22:21-23 warns against oppression:

Thou shalt not wrong a stranger nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. Ye shall not afflict any window, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry unto me. I will surely hear their cry.

Because Israel began to oppress the weak and the poor Amos prophesied against their ill doings. Amos 4:1-2 states:

Because ye oppress the poor and crush the needy. The Lord hath sworn by his holiness that he will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fish hooks.

4.2.3. Oppression of Woman

Throughout history and many cultures woman were marginalised, discriminated and oppressed. Woman was considered to be evil. The historical role of woman was confined to the kitchen. Woman had no religious instruction. They can be wives and mothers and must submit to their husbands (Elizondo, Greinacher 1980:10). Woman was classified as inferior to man because of their xx chromosomes to the xy chromosomes of man. Tertullian refers to Eve as:

You are the devils gateway. You are the unsealer of that forbidden tree. You are the first deserter of the divine law. You are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God’s image in man. On account of your desert, that is death even the Son of God had to die (Ruether 1983:167).

Augustine remarked that woman is not made in the image of God. Martin Luther remarked that God created Adam lord over all living creature but Eve spoiled it all (Daly 1973:3). Woman was not given a place in the church. Woman could teach Sunday school (children) but could not teach adults (the use of the pulpit). There is
the tendency that Jesus only called male disciples. Woman could not serve as witnesses in court. Woman could not own property at some time in history.

Black woman were “double” oppressed. Firstly because they were black and secondly because of being woman.

4.3. WHO ARE THE POOR?

The “poor” person is the oppressed one, the one marginalised from society, the member of the proletariat struggling for the most basic rights; the exploited and social class, the country struggling for its liberation (Gutierrez 1988:173). People have been made poor by the colonizers. The diary of Christopher Columbus, October 12-13, 1492 reads as follows:

It seemed to me that they were a people very poor in everything. All of them go around as naked as their mothers bore them … they do not carry arms nor are they acquainted with them, because I showed them swords and they took them by the edge and through ignorance cut themselves. They have no iron … they should be good intelligent servants … and I belief they would become Christians very easily … I was attentive and laboured to find out if there was any gold … (Sawyer 1992:18).

Glory, gold and gospel made the people poor. The poor are those who have been oppressed, marginalised and discriminated by the oppressed. Those who have been forced removed from their land are part of the poor. Black people who have been discriminated against because of their colour are part of the poor. People who have been classified as non-white are the poor.

Those students and learners who were given an inferior education are the poor. Gutierrez refers to the poor as those who were “absent” from society and the church. Being “absent” because of little or no importance to express themselves to their
sufferings, their plans and their hopes. Dominated peoples exploited social classes, despised races and marginalised cultures are the poor. All those human beings on whom “institutionalised violence” has been used are the poor. Those who have been affected by a lack of food and housing are part of the poor (Gutierrez 1988:21). James Nickoeff (1996:144) identifies the poor as follows:

A poor person is someone without social or economic weight, who is robbed by unjust laws; someone who has no way of speaking up or acting to change the situation. Someone who belongs to a despised race and feels culturally marginalised is in-significant. The poor are found in the statistics but they do not appear there with their own names. We do not know the names of the poor; they are anonymous and remain so. They are insignificant in society but not before God.

4.3.1. Meaning and Types of Poverty

Poverty has three specific meanings namely; material poverty, spiritual poverty and Christian poverty. Gutierrez (1988:162-173) defines it as follows:

4.3.1.1 Material Poverty

Firstly poverty designates material poverty, that is a lack of economic goods for a human life worthy of the name. Some Christians sees this type of poverty as positive, an indifference to the things of this world, a precondition for a life in conformity with the gospel. Poverty has been though of and experienced by some Christians as part of the condition of “poor” an object of mercy. When nations and continents become aware of this poverty they rebel against it.

Material poverty is a subhuman situation. To be poor means to die of hunger, to be illiterate, to be exploited by others, not to know that you are being exploited, not to know that you are a person. Material poverty is a “scandalous conditions” and contrarily to the will of God. The poor person is seen as ebyon, the one who desires,
the beggar, the one who is lacking something and who waits for something from another. He is also *dal*, the weak one, and the frail one. The poor person is also *ani*, the bent over one, the one labouring under a heavy weight, the one not in possession of his whole strength and vigor, the humiliated one. In the New Testament the term *ptokos* is used to speak of the poor person. *Ptokos* means one who does not have what is necessary to subsist, the wretched one driven into begging. Indigent weak bent over express a degrading human situation. This poverty is caused by the injustice of the oppressor, Job 24:2-7 states:

> Some remove the landmarks; they violently take away the flocks and feed thereof. They drive away the ass of the fatherless; they take the widow’s ox for a pledge. They turn the needy out of the way: the poor of the earth hide themselves together. Behold as wild asses in the desert, go they forth to their work; rising betimes for a prey; the wilderness yielded food for them and for their children. They reap every one his corn in the field: and they gather the vintage of the wicked. They cause the naked to lodge without clothing, that they have no covering in the cold.

### 4.3.1.2 Spiritual Poverty

Secondly poverty designates “*spiritual childhood*”. God is not opposed to such poverty. Poverty in this sense is a “*client to God*” the ability to welcome God; an openness to God, a willingness to be used by God, humility before God. From the time of Zephaniah those who awaited the liberating work of the Messiah were “*poor*”. Zephaniah 3:12-13 states:

> I will leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord. The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down and none shall made them afraid.
This poverty is opposed to pride, to an attitude of self-sufficiency; it is synonymous with faith and trust in the Lord.

4.3.1.3 Christian Poverty

This term ‘Christian poverty” is solely used by Gutierrez to refer to solidarity with the poor. This means to protest against poverty. The ideal is not to become poor but to eliminate poverty. It is to oppose any idea of domination. It is to be with the oppressed and against the oppressor.

Now, whether one or all of us decide to protest against, or perpetuate poverty, one thing is clear though, that both in terms of material, and spiritual poverty, namely that women form the bulk of the poor in the world today. In South Africa for instance, poverty is regionally distributed in that it is predominantly the experience of the Eastern Cape, the Limpopo and Kwa-Zulu Natal and to some extent the Northern Cape as well.

4.4. CAUSES OF POVERTY

Professor Pieterse (2001:46-64) gives several factors for the rise of poverty in the South African context. Firstly apartheid was the main cause of poverty in South Africa. The Group Areas Act prohibits black people to migrate from the homelands to the cities where the jobs were. The Mines and Industries Act of 1911 resulted in the withdrawal and suspension of certificates for certain kinds of work on the mines. These certificates were effectively issued only to whites. The Native construction Workers Act (27 of 1951) prohibited the employment of blacks in skilled jobs in the building industry. The Industrial Reconciliation Act (29 of 1956) reserved jobs for whites.

Secondly the economic sanctions of 1984 which was imposed on South Africa due to the failure of P W Botha the president that time; to introduce reform resulted towards poverty of our people.
Thirdly a lack of capital for economic development. South Africans live up to their incomes and save very little. A shortage of capital is one of the main obstacles to economic growth and job creation. Our people incur too much debt and not enough savings. Debt pro rata to the average non-poor household’s expendable income runs to as much as 68%, the highest in history.

Fourthly the unequal income distribution on growth rate. The economic growth rate must be higher than 5% per annum. Government, encouraged by the private sector is trying hard to improve the growth rate. After rising to over 3% in 1994 and then dropping to 2% in 1997-1998, economic growth decline to a negative rate in the latter half of 1998.

Fifthly the insufficient competitiveness of South Africa with the rest of the world. On a list of competitiveness in 1996 South Africa is listed 42nd. Competitiveness is a major incentive to economic development. Our competitiveness with other countries are poor, our economy cannot develop, we cannot deal with poverty. The financial crisis of 1988 was another blow towards poverty. The South African stock exchange lost nearly half its value. Between January and July 1998 the South African Rand devalued by 21, 98% against the US Dollar. The weakening rand and rising interest rates make everyone poorer and slow down business in every sphere of our economy. As a result, more jobs are lost, which inevitably exacerbates poverty.

In South Africa, for instance, Boesak once observed that it is not by accident, or mistake that the majority of the poor are black, it is by structural/systemic design; it is called apartheid. In fact, at some point Boesak (1984:5-35) wondered about the reality of being “Black and Reformed”, reflecting upon his confessional (reformed) tradition, is a Challenge or a contradiction, because the same people who confessed Christ and claimed God to have been on their side when they dispossessed the African indigenous people’s inter alia, was also the same God that all of the Reformed Christians proclaim as their God.
On the other hand, those who believe in God and have been oppressed put their trust in this God, believing that this God is on the side of the Oppressed. Questions should then naturally arise out this ambiguous situation of theological nonsense.

4.5. WHO THAN IS GOD?

In order for us to be balanced, and objective, rather inter-subjective perhaps in our discussions on the views of God, in context of which our choice will become clearer, to the God whom we believe in and serve, one needs first to deal with the non-Biblical, and counterfeit theories about God, in order to move in diametrically opposed direction towards the God of the Oppressed, in such a manner that God’s involvement in our history should become apparent, thereby implying at least implicitly, the direct experiences of God, on the part of Pentecostal believers in particular, and by the evangelical-ecumenical Christianity on the other.

4.5.1. NON-CHRISTIAN WORLD VIEWS OF GOD

Gordon Kaufman (1981) writes, “The term God raises special problems of meaning because it is a noun which by definition refers to a reality transcendent of and thus not locatable within experience”. These non-Christian world views has the idea that God is absent in humanities experience.

4.5.1.1. THE ATHEISTIC VIEW

Atheism is the belief that there is no God or that God does not exist. Practical atheist lives and acts as if there is no God. Such people belief all religion is false. Dogmatic atheist openly and boldly declares that God does not exist. An example is Karl Marx, the forerunner of communism.
4.5.1.2. THE AGNOSTIC WORLD VIEW

Agnostics affirm that neither the nature nor existence of God is known or knowable. Agnostic’s belief that whatever questions cannot be answered by scientific methods must be left permanently unanswered. They also believe that all genuine knowledge is contained within the boundaries of science, or what can be observed.

4.5.1.3. THE PANTHEISTIC WORLD VIEW

Pantheism is the theory that states that God is all and all is God. Pantheism has a theory that everything exist only in the mind. Pantheists claim wisdom about God but do not worship the true God.

4.5.1.4. THE DEISTIC WORLD VIEW

Deism is the theory that God is present in creation only by Gods power, not in Gods very nature and being. The deist believes that God left creation to operate under natural laws; hence there is no place for miracles and providence God create the world like a “clock maker” and left it to run by itself. Deism claims that all truth about God is discoverable by reason. Deism accepts the transcendence but not Gods immanence.

In direct contrast to the Deist, and other non-Biblical theories about God, the God of Biblical Christianity is surely a God of the poor.

4.6. GOD OF THE POOR

God detest material poverty. God is on the side of the poor and God will deliver the poor from the causes of poverty and from their situation of poverty.

Our God is the God of the poor that brings life. Our God is against those who deprives the needy, those who takes away a neighbour’s living and those that deprive an employee of his wages. God speaks out on this injustice, Amos 5:11-2 states:
… as your treading is upon the poor, and ye take from him burdens of wheat: ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them; ye have planted vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine of them. For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right.

Gustavo Gutierrez (1988: xxviii) identifies God as a God with a “preferential option” for the poor. Poverty means death; unjust death, the premature death of the poor, physical death. This death is also cultural death. Where people is not taken into account, when people is despised in one way or another, then in a certain sense the persons who belong to that culture are also being killed. God is the one that brings forth life, God restores dignity. God has a “preference” for the weak, abused, the hungry and suffering. “Preference” implies the universality of God’s love, which excludes no one. This “preference” is what comes first. God prefers the forgotten, the oppressed, the poor, the abandoned, the hungry and the suffering.

Boesak was once a Conference Speaker of the South African Council of churches, where he was given a theme, titled the “God of the Poor” (SACC, 1984, video of the same title).

Basing as he did, his Biblical studies of the terms of poverty in the Hebrew and Greek Bible texts, Boesak concluded that God is on the side of the Poor and the Oppressed and that the Church should be on the side of the Poor, and the oppressed, by theological extension.

The God of Biblical Christianity is surely a God of the oppressed. God always fights the battle of the weak and oppressed. We see Jesus as “a bridge of trouble waters”. Jesus doesn’t come before time; Jesus doesn’t come after time, Jesus comes just on time (Cone 1975:35).
God become man in Jesus Christ to be with humanity in our wretchedness. Jesus is the liberator of the oppressed. Jesus is for the oppressed, the poor and unwanted of society and against the oppressors.

4.7. GOD OF THE OPPRESSED

God takes sides with the oppressed because all humanity, male and female are the image of God. When one oppress, discriminate or marginalized humanity one basically oppress God’s image. Being the image of God we have the ability to be masters in God’s creation. We have the ability to create, to have minds to think and to know, to act, people like God are creative, therefore if anyone takes away these abilities from humanity God distance himself from them.

God is always on the side of the down trodden. God is graciously on the side of the oppressed not because they are more virtuous and better than their oppressors, but solely and simply because they are oppressed.

James H Cone (1975:20) distinguished between the prayers of white oppressors and that of the black oppressed. He writes, white oppressors pray as follows:

O Lahd, the first thing I want you to understand, is that it is a white man talking to you. This aint no nigger whooping and hollering for something and don’t know what to do with it after he gets it. This is a white man talking to you, and I want you to pay some attention. Now, in the first place, Lord, we would like a little rain. It’s been powerful dry around here, and we needs rain mighty bad. But don’t come in no storm like you did last year. Come ca’m and gentle and water our crops.

And now another thing, Lahd - don’t let these niggers be as sassy this coming year as they have been in the past. That’s all, Lahd. Amen.
And the black oppressed pray for “his brother in white” as follows:

Oh Lawd, gib him de eye ob de eagle, dat he may spy out sin afar off, weave his hands to the gospel plow, tie his tongue to de limbs ob truth, nail his ear to de South Pole. Bow his head away down between his knees, and his knees way down in some longsome dark and narrow valley where prayer is much wanted to made. Noint him wid de kerosene oil of salvation and set him on fire.

Jesus is not the lily white, blue eye golden haired and dove of peace passive Jesus “the Christ” adopted, accepted and perfected by a white theology. Peter spoke about Jesus in Acts 10:38:

God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil: for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem: whom thy hang on a tree: Him God raised up the third day and shewed him openly: Not to all people, but unto witnesses chosen before God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he arose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach into the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets’ witness that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

Jesus is not less than God. Jesus is not a “demi god”. Jesus is God. God is a community. John’s gospel says that Jesus is “the offspring of God himself”, the word that become flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:1). We encounter God in our social existence of our black experience. Jesus is not only expressed in formal church doctrine but also in the rhythm, the beat, and the swing of life (Cone 1975:115). Therefore Crystal Tabernacle congregants expressed Jesus in their rhythm as follows:
A Gona Ya Swana Le Jesu
(There is no one like Jesus)
A Gona Ya Swana Naye
(No one like Him)
Kanyakanyaka hohle, hohle
(I looked around)
Kadikuloha, hohle, hohle
(I looked all over)
Ka Mofumana Jesu Waka
(At last I found my Jesus)
A Gona Ya Swana Naye
(No one like Him)

James Cone (1975:136) identifies Jesus as follows:

Christ blackness is both literal and symbolic. His blackness is literal in the sense that he truly becomes one with the oppressed blacks, taking their suffering as his suffering and revealing that he is found in the history of our struggle, the story of our pain, and the rhythm of our bodies … To say that Christ is black means that God, in his infinite wisdom and mercy not only takes color seriously, he takes it upon himself and discloses his will to make us whole – new creatures born in the spirit of divine blackness and redeemed through the blood of Christ. Christ is black, therefore, not because of some cultural or psychological need of black people but because and only because Christ really enters into our world where the poor, the despised, and the blacks are, disclosing that he is with them, enduring their humiliation and pain and transforming oppressed people into liberated servants. Indeed if Christ is not truly black, then the historical Jesus lied. God did not anoint him “to preach good news to the poor” and neither did he send him “to proclaim release to the captives and recovering the sight to the blind to set at liberty those who are
“oppressed” (Luke 4:18). If Christ is not black, the gospel is not good news to the oppressed, and Marx’s observation is right. “Religion is the sign of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world … the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people”.

God comes to us in Christ, not as a king in royal robes, but as a prince in beggars garments. God cast his lot with marginal men and women who are not only suffering but rejected as well. God is a God of history; God adopted Israel and entered into her life. God’s presence and power were a source of strength and guidance for a people traded off between the greed powers of the ancient Middle East, a people who experienced throughout the Biblical period as through most of history in colonial situation (Roberts 1974:105).

God is not lofty and distant, stranger and wholly other, God is present in the black experience. God is a God of social change in black people’s lives. This God is the same God who delivered Moses and the Israelites from bondage, God will also deliver human beings from oppression, marginalisation and discrimination.

God is the one who represent the oppressed woman. God is the one who judge those who grind the faces of windows and orphans. God is the one who overthrows the unjust society by turning it upside down. God is seen as the champion of the social victims. Ruether refers that the idea of God as a powerful old man with a white beard, even crowned and robed in the insignia of human kings or the triple tiara of the pope should be treated as idolatry. When the word “Father” is taken literally to mean that God is male and not female, than this word becomes idolatrous (Ruether 1983:66). Hosea pictures God as “a loving mother” who agonises over her children’s waywardness.

Hosea 11:3 states:

I tough Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms; but they know not that I healed them.
Isaiah refers to God as a “nursing mother”.

Isaiah 49:15:

Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should not have compassion on the child of her womb? Year, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee?

God identifies himself universally with the poor, the oppressed, fatherless, motherless, the woman and stranger. The Evangelical Christian Woman of Africa declared in their PACWA Covenant (Pan African Christian Woman Assembly) the following:

Where God is biased, it is in favour of the oppressed, the widow, the orphans, the aliens and the poor, the majority of whom are woman (Usry, Keener 1996:115).

The God of the Dutch Reformed Church who wrote: “As a Church we have always worked purposefully for the separation of the races” (Boesak 1984:115), cannot be the God, of the oppressed. God is no neutral God but a thoroughly biased God who was forever taking the side of the oppressed, of the weak, of the exploited, of the hungry, homeless and of the scum of society (Maimela 1998:118). Crystal Tabernacle agrees with the words of Maluleke (1997:27) when he wrote:

Jesus is not a removed King who sits on the clouds. Nor is he obsessed with what to do with sinners. He is the healer par excellence – not in the narrow sense of the word, but in the sense of Him who makes people to “come all – right” … this is not just a happy – clappy Jesus. He is a screaming Jesus – screaming on the cross and screaming in Africa; on the pulpits in the streets and in the squatter camps. The African Christ who smiles on the cross is a paradox inviting reflection. This is a defiant smile. A smile that smiles away the pain of the cross.
Africans are taking Jesus by the hand, teaching Him a few African “moves’ and sensitising him to local issues and conditions.

It is very difficult to separate oppression and poverty. People were not born poor, people were made poor by oppression and in the South African experience by colonialism. Dr Takatso Mofokeng (1988:34) expresses it as follows:

When the white man came to our country he had the Bible and we had the land. The white man said to us, let us pray. After the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the bible.

The message at Crystal Tabernacle appeals mainly to the most disenfranchised, those with little stake in the status quo, people with no reason to hope that things will improve. Pentecostalism in the 20th Century started with the poor. Harvey Cox (1995:119) writes:

The Pentecostal movement started from the bottom. A partially blind, poor black man with no little or no book learning outside of the Bible heard a call. Seymour was anything but a Paul of Tarsus, trained by the leading religious scholars, or an Augustine of Hippo, schooled by the most polished Roman rhetoricians, or a Calvin or Luther educated in the original language of scripture. He was a son of former slaves who had to listen to sermons through a window and who undoubtedly travelled to Los Angeles in the segregated section of the train. Yet under Seymour’s guidance a movement arose whose impact of Christianity, less than a century after his arrival in Los Angeles has been compared to the Protestant Reformation.

Rosemary Radford Ruether (1995:95) identifies Gods “preferential option” as follows:
God opts for the poor, not because the poor are “good”, much less because poverty is good, but because the poor are victims of injustice and God is a God of justice. God’s option for the poor represents divine protest against human disorder and divine advocacy on the side of those who struggle for justice.

This God is the God that “acts”. If we seek God earnestly, we shall find God, or rather God will find us. God answers prayer and it is a sign that he “acts”. When we pray we are conscious of calling upon a God who “acts”. God “acts” frequently, daily, hourly within the sphere of human life. Through the incarnation God “acted". Karl Barth (1960:45-47) states:

… God exists, speaks and “acts” as the partner of humanity, though of course as the absolutely superior partner … In Jesus Christ there is no isolation of man from God or God from man. Rather in Him we encounter the history, the dialogue, in which God and man meet together and are together, the reality of the covenant mutually contracted, preserved and fulfilled by them. Jesus Christ is in His one Person, as true God, man’s loyal partner, and as true man, Gods. He is the Lord humbled for communion with man and likewise the Servant exalted to communion with God. He is the Word spoken from the loftiest, most luminous transcendence and likewise the Word heard in the deepest, darkest immanence.

Through the incarnation God walked into history God does not sit at the nerve centre of operations with a dozen telephones on his desk. God walks into the centre of human history in His Divine Incarnation. In the incarnation God and human beings are united so closely that nothing can ever separate them. Through the incarnation God has become one of us. God “acts”, God was willing to forgive human beings even before Jesus died. The incarnation was a sign that God had already forgiven humanity. (When you are willing to be one with someone who has offended you, you
have forgiven that person in your heart). St Anselm of Canterbury (1962:198) identify the God that “acts” as follows:

Redemption for humanity could not be affected by any other being but God. If there was any other being who could save humanity from death, than man would be rightly adjudged to be the servant of that being. And if this were to be so, humanity would in no wise be restored to that dignity which would have been his had he never sinned. Humanity was to be the servant of God through eternity, if another being saved humanity, humanity would be the servant of that being who was not God, and whom the angels did not serve. God has redeemed us by His death, and has shown His love toward us, and God overcome the devil for us.

God is ceaselessly active among the poor, downtrodden, the deprived, despised, and marginalised.

Our God embraces suffering and makes it His own. God does not temporarily condescend. A N Whitehead said, “God is a fellow sufferer who understands”. Abraham Heschel said, “God is hurt and moved by the suffering of God’s people”. Kazoh Kitamori said, “God is the wounded Lord, having pain in Himself, God is able to give meaning and dignity to human suffering on account of the fact that He also is in pain and suffers”. (McGrath 1994:253). Jurgen Moltman (1974 argued:

A God who cannot suffer is poorer than any human. For a God who is incapable of suffering is a being who cannot be involved. Suffering and injustice do not affect him. And because he is so completely insensitive, he cannot be affected or shaken by anything. He cannot weep, for he has no tears. But the one who cannot suffer cannot love either. So he is a loveless being.
We reject the “Deism theory” that teaches that God made the world, and that the world was able to carry on without any further help from God. God does not fold his arms, and watch the world carry on without God’s intervention. God constantly care for his creation. God constantly “look ahead for us”. God is a God of providence. Issues of providence, God’s acts of mercy, justice and loving intervention. Speak of a God who directly relates to the people in the world more especially those who are the poor, oppressed and black in this context.

Both Old and New Testaments confirms that humanity experience God directly. God has an interest in direct communication with humanity. Genesis 3:8 states, “and they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day”. The idea that God is only “transcendent” takes away the possibility that one can experience God directly. God is not a “Deus absconditus”. God is active in the world and active with humanity. God is not independent of the human situation. God is not aloof or a distant God, God deals with humanity. The love of God suggests a God that is dealing with us. A J Heschel wrote about the “pathos” (involvement) of God. By the “pathos” of God Heschel did not proclaim a detached, remote, dispassionate, uninvolved and neutral God (König 1982:92) Pentecostalism, which started about 1906, places a lot of emphasis on “direct experience” of God. Crystal Tabernacle contributes to the religious revitalising experience. Many lives have been changed through the emphasis of a direct experience of God. Morton Kelsey confirms that humanity can and do have an experience of God in the here and now (Kelsey 1972:9).

God’s direct experiences with humanity are described all through the Old Testament and in nearly every book of the New Testament. Abraham the patriarch had direct experiences with God. Genesis 12:6 states, “And the Lord appeared unto Abraham”. Genesis 15:1 states, “the word of the Lord came unto Abraham in a vision, saying fear not Abraham: I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward”. Genesis 17:1 states, “Abraham was ninety years old and nine and the Lord appeared unto Abraham”. Moses had direct experiences with God. Exodus 3:4 states, “God called unto him out of the midst of the bush”. In Moses experiences with God, God showed
that God is involved in history. God is the political God, the protector of the poor and the establisher of the rights for those who are oppressed. Joshua had direct experiences of God. Joshua 10:10 states, “the Lord spoke unto Joshua”.

Many other man and woman experienced God directly. God spoke to them, appeared unto them, gave them visions, dreams or spoke through the prophets unto them.

God’s power, God’s healing and other manifestations are also described in the New Testament. The direct experience of God was not given only to the intelligent or sophisticated Morton Kelsey writes:

Religious experiences do not just belong to the intelligent or the sophisticated. Quite the contrary they are given to children and simple peasants, as well as philosophers as well to pious folk who feel they need no special help (Kelsey 1972:148).

The incarnation was a direct experience of God. Jesus is not less than God or a “demi god”, Jesus is God. Lepers, the blind, the sick, the lame, the palsy all had direct experiences of God. The poor, rich, famous, not so famous, young, old, male and female all had direct experiences of God of the poor.

Crystal Tabernacle is a Pentecostal Church. Morton Kelsey (1972:35) writes about Pentecostals as follows:

… the only large group of Christians who take the idea of the direct divine encounter seriously, arise from certain conservations are the Pentecostals.
4.8 NOTIONS OF GOD IN SONG

As stated before Crystal Tabernacle is a musical church. Music is an integral part of its service and in its music praise and honour are directed towards God. With the expression of music one can learn who God is.

Bevans (1998:12) state that we need to recognize that great theology has been written in the form of a hymn or poem.

There are several examples of songs which contain and explain various notions of God. A very popular one is as follows:

Jesus is a Mighty God.
Jesus is a Mighty God.
Everybody bow before Him.
Jesus is a Mighty God.
Every Pastor bow before Him.
Jesus is a Mighty God.
Every brother bow before Him.
Jesus is a Mighty God.
Every sister bow before Him.
Jesus is a Mighty God.
Every demon bow before Him.

The words “Mighty God” is Scriptural and once more show the importance of Scripture at Crystal Tabernacle. It is the prophet Isaiah that prophesied about this “Mighty God”. Isaiah 9:6 states: “… his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God”…. Mighty God describes where our people come from. Our people come from gangsterism, drugs, prostitution, alcohol abuse and all sort of sinful nature. It took the might of God to deliver our people including myself from such deliverance. This notion of “Mighty God” is proof of Gods omnipotence. God is all-powerful and able to do whatever God wills. God can do everything that is in
harmony with his perfections. This word “Mighty God” can be identified with the Hebrew word “El”. El suggests the idea of powers, strength, authority, and to some the idea of one unto whom we come. El Shaddai is a compound of the Hebrew El which means “mountain”. Possibly this refers to the one who stands high above us and watches us. It is often translated “God Almighty.”

Of the songs played along and danced to in worship is the title “Africa Your Time has come”. This should speak to us of a few things. One is recognition of the signs of the times. The other is relevance - speaking in other words, words of direct meaning into our national standing among the Nations of the World. The third point is that the Church thankfully identifies itself with Africa – receiving with gladness, the message from South Africa’s State President Mbeki, without necessarily becoming a State Church by that token of support. God was, is and shall be involve in Africa. Gene Rice (1994:27-44) argue that the Kenites a tribe from Africa taught Moses a new conception of God. And this new conception of God entails proper forms of worship, and a new lifestyle in conformity with the worship of the bearer of the new name. She continues her argument by stating that Israel came to know Yahweh, the God of the Kenites as a God who acts on behalf of the oppressed.

Another song that Crystal congregants sing towards their God is as follows:

Akekho Ofana Nawe
Nkosi Yamakhos
Siyakudumisa

Emhlabeni kulawula wena
Zonke izinto zilawulwa
Nguwe Nkosi yamkhosi.
There is none like you
Lord of Lords, King of Kings
We praise you.
You are in control
Everything are under your control
You are ruling, in charge of everything
Lord of Lords.

This speaks to us about “Adonai” which literally means “Lord” or “Master”, and conveys the idea of rulership and dominion because of what God is and what God has done; God claims the service and allegiance of His people. This name is applied in the New Testament to the glorified Christ. This name is used to address God for what God has done through Jesus Christ, who has reconciled us, so that God indeed become our Lord. It also speaks of a notion of trust than of fear or terror.

Another popular and Biblical notion of God can be identified within a song called Holy God. The words are as follows:

Holy God, You are Holy
Holy, Holy is our God
Righteous God, Jesus you are Holy
Holy, Holy is our God
All the angels bow before you, they sing
Holy, Holy is our God.

The holiness of God means God’s absolute moral purity; God can neither sin nor tolerate sin. The root meaning of “holy” is “separated”. This meaning has three derived aspects of holiness. Firstly holiness becomes equivalent to deity. Holiness is synonymous with “divine”. The worship of other gods profanes God’s holy name (Lev 20:3). Everything associated with God’s person is holy, sacred, totally separated from all that is imperfect or sinful, unapproachably perfect in holiness. There is none holy (uniquely divine) as God; for there is none beside God. 1 Samuel 2:2 states: “there is none holy as the Lord: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God”. Holiness is what characterises God, and it includes all Gods other attributes. Secondly God shares Gods holiness with His people, they too are
“separated” unto God. Isaiah 57:15 states: “Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit …” Divine holiness is not exclusive, but it reaches out to draw others to God’s separation. Thirdly God’s holiness is conforming to God’s moral standards. God’s moral purity leads God to separate Himself from evil.

Another song entitled “You are God Alone” is another favourite, its words is as follows:

There’s no question of your greatness
No searching of your power
All the wonder of your glory
To you, forty years is but one hour
Your knowledge is all encompassing
To Your wisdom there is no end
For you alone are God
You are God alone.

Firstly this song speaks of God’s greatness. God’s greatness can be expressed in God’s non-moral attributes namely omnipresence, omniscience and omnipotence. These attributes are compound words using the Latin prefix “omni” meaning “all”. Thus omnipresent means “present everywhere at once”. God is present in all his creation, but in no manner limited by it. God’s omnipresence has special reference to his presence within the universe. God the ever-present one is always available to help us. Neither distance nor darkness hides God. Omniscience speaks that God is infinite in knowledge. Scripture declares that God’s understanding is infinite, Psalm 147:5 states: “Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite”. Nothing is hidden from God; even the hairs on our head are numbered. The omnipotence of God is a notion of God that declares that God is all-powerful and able to do whatever God wills. God can do everything that is in harmony with his
perfections. Matthew 19:26 states: “... with God all things are possible”, and Jeremiah 32:17 states: “… there is nothing too hard for God”.

Secondly this song declares that only God alone is God. This song recognises that only God is the only true God. Other gods cannot see, or hear or help or open up the future, only God alone are God. Isaiah 40 refers that all other gods are manufactured gods; one will take a tree and form a god, another will melt gold, some will cast silver to manufacture these gods. Irrespective these gods are all motionless, “they shall not be moved” (Isaiah 40:20). Only God alone is God. Furthermore Isaiah the prophet declared that other gods cannot even stand on their own … “Fastened it with nails, that it should not be moved” (Isaiah 41:7), declared Isaiah speaking of other gods. But speaking of the only God, Isaiah said: “Fear not; for God is with thee: be not dismayed; for God will strengthen thee, God will help thee, God will uphold thee with the right hand of his righteousness” (Isaiah 41:10).

4.9 CONCLUSION

All discriminatory laws that were passed affected these people, yet they experience God in their own context. God was not absent in their experience. God revealed himself through Jesus Christ in their oppression, marginalisation, discrimination and wretchedness. God was and is active in the historical setting of our people. The God that led the Israelites out of their political bondage in Egypt is the same God that led South Africans out of their political and social imprisonment from their oppressors. The entry of God into history in the incarnation has a vital message for us (Roberts 1974:125). Jesus proved to us that he is interested and active with the oppressed, uneducated, unemployed and burdened by the troubles of our world. Jesus does not only bring personal peace but social salvation.

God not only save us from sin but God liberates. The God of the slave masters is different from the God of the slaves. Our women who were oppressed, marginalized, discriminated and subjugated experience God different in their context. The patriarchal system presented an inadequate God to woman. God cannot be limited to
masculine images. A masculine God is an inadequate God, a cramped and regulated God. When we limited our thinking and speaking about God to masculine images, females and males fail to realise their full potential. God identifies with the oppressed, fatherless, motherless, the woman and the stranger.

Furthermore, it should be kept in mind that to speak of a God who acts in history, which intervenes on the side of the Poor and oppressed, is to relate a direct experience with God.

In other words, in the Scriptures (Law and the Prophets), the God of the Poor is immanent, and active in the people’s own struggles with the oppressor(s). They worship as they struggle, and they struggle as they worship, even in Pentecostal style.
CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSION

5.1. INTRODUCTION

In the Introductory Chapter I dealt with the background information. Chapter Two focussed on the historical introduction of Crystal Tabernacle, their statement of faith and Crystal Tabernacle’s activities, songs and sermon analysis – specifically with the highlighted fact that Crystal Tabernacle experience God directly. Chapter Three concerned itself with the inherited notions of God from a traditional Pentecostal view. Chapter Four dealt with the predominant notions of God experienced by Crystal Tabernacle congregants within their particular context. This final Chapter focuses on the author’s summary and conclusions.

5.2. SUMMARY

The writer of this dissertation wanted to test the doctrine of God by more extensive research, and he is of the opinion that the notions of God can be verified.

The first important finding of this research is that most of the Pentecostal’s ideas on notions of God including that of Crystal Tabernacle originate from their inheritance. And this is in line with the argument of Henry Newman (although not Pentecostal), that a true development of doctrine is “the preservation of the type or idea” (Toon 1979:1-16).

The second finding of this research is that Crystal Tabernacle congregants experience notions of God differently in their own context. This is also in line with the argument of Henry Newman, which he calls “Preservative additions”. Newman states the following: “it is an addition that illustrates, not obscures corroborates, not corrects the body of thought from which it proceeds” (Toon 1979:12)
Thirdly, Crystal Tabernacle’s expressions on notions of God believe in an ethos of “God with us” and they do their theology in the form of story and song. In their understanding of notions of God, God is in the flow of their history and they are living in this history.

Fourthly, Crystal Tabernacle is in a strong position to make contributions to the notions of God reflecting their own ethos and experience, which will no doubt differ from the type of scholastic discourse based on Aristotelian logic with all its concepts and definitions. This position is dynamic, not rationalistic; it is an openness to the Spirit.

Fifthly, Crystal Tabernacle, because they are Biblical and practical people, can speak strongly on the notions of God. They know from the Bible and experience about the willingness of God to relate to his creatures.

This dissertation is an expression of Crystal Tabernacles congregants about their creator. It is an interpretation of an individual observation of how Crystal Tabernacle brethren express themselves to their God. Therefore their God is also my God. God is still beyond our human understanding and expression. There are many different concepts of God, and these in this dissertation is verified to be absolute correct.

Pentecostals are among the most committed churchgoers in the townships. They are experiencing the living God through the power of the Holy Spirit; and their lives have been radically changed as a result. Pentecostals do make a significant contribution to the doctrine of God. Pentecostal contribution is personal rather than absolutist, relational rather than unconditioned, and biblical rather than traditional or philosophical. Its contribution comes naturally from their narrative reading of the Bible. Pentecostalism respects the formulations of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and others but it privileges Scripture against ideals drawn from Greek philosophy.

Crystal Tabernacle is proof of the notions of God. God changes lives of the disenfranchised, God is active with humanity. Crystal Tabernacle has a contribution to make to the doctrine of God arising out of their distinctive hermeneutics and spirituality.
God is not a “Deus Abscondis”. God is not, in other words, aloof and distant. God is not an absentee landlord, detached, remote, dispassionate, uninvolved or neutral.

It is difficult to describe God. Firstly we cannot see God face to face. Secondly, God is much greater than anything we have ever seen or can even think of. Therefore it is not easy to describe God. But this does not mean that we can say nothing about God. To describe God we use words that we know like “Father”, “loving”, “all-powerful”, unlimited”, etc. But only God knows the full meaning of those words when they are used to describe God. Only God knows in what sense God is a Father (obviously God is not a Father in a sexual sense).

God than is much greater, much more wonderful than anything we can ever say about God. Even though our people have been affected by poverty God is on their side. God is not absent in the political realm. Joseph became the governor of Egypt and saved his family from famine. Daniel became a high official in the Babylonian court and lead Nebuchadnezzar into submission to God. Esther was made queen to the Persian King and stopped a massacre of the Jews. Joseph of Arimathea is described by Mark as a “prominent member of the council”. God is the God of the poor, downtrodden, disenfranchised but God will lift us up.

5.3. FINAL CONCLUSION

Crystal Tabernacle recognises the fact that the doctrine of God is a very broad subject. This observation is an individual’s summary of how God is experienced in a particular context, but his observation cannot cover and deal with all notions on God. To illustrate this point John Mbiti (1970:13) relates the story of an old woman who went in search of God, who had afflicted her since she was young.

Thinking that God dwelt in the sky, she build one tower after another, but each time, before she could reach God, the bottom timbers rotted and the tower tumbled down. She than started on a journey, travelling from country to country, hoping to reach the point where the earth and sky touched and there to find the road to God. She never reach that point and died heart broken. But what was established is that God is
beyond human search and reach; yet paradoxically God is so near that God "sits on the back of every one of us". God acts for the improvement and betterment of human beings.

This and other theological studies on the contribution of the Pentecostal Movement demonstrate amply, and not exhaustively of course, the fact that Pentecostalism, is both Biblical in its textual roots, and that its historical and social beginnings are black underclass, from the Azusa street revivals. By using my tradition to critique a theology and ethic of racism, including apartheid – I am making a contribution into a re-affirmed Charismatic and Pentecostal progressive, or liberative thinking, via the notions of God in the Crystal Tabernacle Ministries.

This notions of God is not the final word. All scholars write according to the grace that is given to us, in proportion to our faith.
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