

**INAUGURATED ESCHATOLOGY AND GENDER:
REDEFINING THE TRAJECTORY OF WILLIAM J. WEBB'S
REDEMPTIVE MOVEMENT HERMENEUTIC**

BY

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SUMMARY

Approaches to meaning and the way that texts are read have changed dramatically over the past century. This is particularly true where interpretations of texts have been given an authoritative status, and used to perpetuate power imbalances and discrimination. The exposure of the way that texts are used in this way, particularly by feminist thinkers, has put pressure on traditional Christian understandings of gender and the role of women in the Christian faith community. There is currently a debate within Evangelical Christianity over whether women are equal to men in status, and whether they can function in certain leadership roles.

William Webb proposes a redemptive-movement hermeneutic that he uses to identify cultural components within Scripture that may have been progressive in terms of their own culture, but are regressive relative to ours. Webb proposes eighteen criteria that enable the interpreter to discover the redemptive movement of these texts relative to their own culture, and then makes application to contemporary culture on the basis of this. The main weakness of Webb's model is that the destination of the redemptive movement he discerns in Scripture seems to be determined by what is pragmatic and even politically correct in his own western culture.

This research will propose an eschatological trajectory for Webb's redemptive movement that is based on an understanding of the kingdom of God as the rule of God, which has broken into history as an inaugurated reality in the coming of Jesus Christ. When eschatology becomes the controlling factor for Webb's redemptive movement

hermeneutic, an understanding of gender emerges from the Bible that is completely egalitarian. This is confirmed by examining a number of eschatological motifs for their significance with regard to gender. The eschatological egalitarianism proposed by this research encourages the full participation of women in all areas of life and ministry in the Christian faith community.

LIST OF KEY TERMS

1. Hermeneutics
2. Feminism
3. Gender
4. Culture
5. Evangelical
6. Biblical Authority
7. Redemptive-Movement
8. Trajectory
9. Inaugurated Eschatology
10. Kingdom of God
11. Equality

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INTRODUCTION

Walter Truett Anderson (1990:6), author of *Reality Isn't What It Used to Be: Theatrical Politics, Ready-to-Wear Religion, Global Myths, Primitive Chic, and Other Wonders of the Postmodern World*, describes a profound shift in human thinking. He attributes this transition to three processes: a breakdown of belief where there is no consensus about what is true, the birth of a global culture, and a new polarization over the nature of social truth.

Anderson (1990:x-xi) makes a distinction between “objectivists” who believe that truth is objective, and “constructivists” who believe that people construct their own reality. He explains this distinction,

“The constructivists ... say that we do not have a “God’s eye” view of nonhuman reality, never had, never will have. They say we live in a symbolic world, a social reality that many people construct together and yet experience as the objective ‘real world’. And they also tell us the earth is not a *single* symbolic world, but rather a vast universe of ‘multiple realities’, because different groups of people construct different stories, and because different languages embody different ways of experiencing life”.

The shift that Anderson describes has had and is having a pervasive impact on culture and thinking at both academic and popular levels. Possibly the most significant impact arising from this shift is in the rejection of frameworks of thought that attempt to provide a comprehensive explanation of reality and therefore a foundation for life. These “metanarratives” are associated with oppression and therefore rejected. By calling these supposedly objective systems of thought narratives or stories, truth claims are basically

fictionalised. On the one hand, as Veith (1994:49) points out, this is essentially assuming what one is trying to prove; it is also inherently contradictory in that it is an absolute truth claim that all absolute truth claims are invalid.

Notwithstanding the circularity and contradiction which is inherent in its reasoning, constructivism has provided a valuable critique of the myth of objectivity, and the way this supposed objectivity has been used to build and maintain oppressive structures. It was inevitable that this critique of metanarratives would include not only the Bible and Christianity in the broadest sense, but also the way the Bible has been used to legitimate and perpetuate patriarchy and the oppression of women. Feminist critique has fed postmodern consciousness, which in turn has stimulated feminist critique of traditional ways of interpreting the Bible, particularly with regard to the way these interpretations have been used to perpetuate certain gender roles. The debate over gender roles within Christian faith communities has taken place on multiple levels, and even those who Anderson would describe as “objectivists” are re-evaluating their interpretation as to what they understand the Bible to teach about women. Social changes before and after the emancipation of slaves led to similar reinterpretation of the Bible, where slavery had previously been defended by certain interpretations of Scripture.

The issue of whether women are limited to certain roles within the Christian faith community has been the subject of considerable debate over the past thirty years or so, particularly within what could be broadly called Evangelical Christianity. Evangelicals believe in the inerrancy of the Bible, and that it is the Christian’s sole authority for faith and life. They also believe in personal salvation through conversion and regeneration,

resulting in spiritual transformation. Bebbington (1989:1-2) lists conversionism, activism, Biblicism and crucicentrism as four priorities that form the basis of evangelicalism.

This is the tradition from which I come and from which I write (although I am not certain that the term is altogether helpful, arising as it does from theological disagreement between so-called liberals and conservatives in the 20th century, because it creates a polarity which is not always accurate or useful in the current theological context). It is necessary to be clear about this because it will explain my commitment to the Bible as both revelatory and authoritative.

Within Evangelical Christianity (which would fall into Anderson's category of "objectivist"), proponents of a hierarchical relationship between men and women claim Divine support for their position based on their interpretation of the Bible, while proponents of egalitarian relationships interpret these same texts differently and point to how the misapplication of biblical texts has been used to justify other forms of oppression and evil, particularly in the case of slavery. A recent contribution to the debate is William J. Webb's book, *"Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis"*. Based on eighteen intra and extra textual criteria, Webb proposes a "Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic" for establishing the application of biblical texts for contemporary culture.

This research will evaluate Webb's contribution, and propose a different *terminus ad quem* for his hermeneutical trajectory. I shall demonstrate that while Webb offers useful insights for resolving some of the interpretive difficulties inherent in the biblical texts that address gender issues, there are fundamental weaknesses in his choice of destination for the redemptive movement he finds in Scripture.

In order to do that I shall outline the hermeneutical context in which both feminist and traditional readings of the Bible occur, and then briefly discuss the development of feminist thought and theology. Following this I will attempt to identify ideological conflicts that underlie the debate.

In the second chapter I will summarize the gender debate within evangelical theology, and then describe and critically evaluate Webb's model. A problem with Webb's approach is that the end-point of his hermeneutical trajectory seems to be defined by his own culture. The criterion by which biblical texts are evaluated and perhaps reinterpreted becomes politically correct western culture.

I will begin to develop my thesis that while Webb's proposal of a redemptive-movement hermeneutical trajectory is helpful, it is more accurate to define the end-point of the trajectory eschatologically as this is how the Bible seems to view the movement of human history and redemption. Webb's own eschatology is not explicit in *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals*, although he refers to the new creation and uses terms like "kingdom" (2004:54), "kingdom values" (2004:23) and "kingdom of God" (2004:109) without explaining what he means by these. This lack of definition and explanation is particularly frustrating since Webb (2004:22) makes statements such as, "It is necessary for Christians to challenge their culture where it departs from kingdom values", without really explaining what he means or how these values arise. This research will seek to provide the understanding of concepts such as "kingdom of God" and "kingdom values" that Webb's work lacks, and in so doing to propose an eschatological trajectory for Webb's redemptive-movement hermeneutic.

In chapter three I will describe the understanding of Jesus' message of the kingdom of

God that provides my eschatological framework for the trajectory of Webb's redemptive-movement hermeneutic. N.T. Wright (1996:28-29; 83-91) and James Dunn (2003:383f) demonstrate that there is a remarkable level of consensus among current New Testament scholars that Jesus' central message was the announcement and inauguration of the Kingdom of God. Proceeding from a theological understanding that this message articulated the reality of the Kingdom of God as the dynamic reign and rule of God that has broken into history, particularly in the incarnation and at Pentecost, I will describe the significance of this theology of the kingdom for our interpretation and understanding of biblical texts on gender roles.

Wright and Dunn are New Testament theologians who write from within the epistemological framework of Bernard Lonergan's Critical Realism. Lonergan (1972) developed a theory of knowledge in which knowing is a conjunction of experience, understanding and judging (1972:238). Ben Meyer (1989) applied Lonergan's Critical Realism to the study of the New Testament. This approach of Critical Realism within a rigorous application of the historical method addresses the dual pitfalls of historical and textual scepticism. Critical realism avoids these hazards with a mediating position that offers explanations and interpretations that have the greatest probability rather than attempting to claim absolute certainty.

Finally, having proposed a destination for the redemptive movement within Scripture that is eschatological and grounded in biblical theology, I will examine the significance of various eschatological motifs for a Christian understanding of gender. Eschatological motifs, such as the coming of the Holy Spirit, "in Christ" statements, the New Creation and the restoration of the image of God, and the resurrection will be examined for their significance in guiding a Christian understanding of gender. Scriptures related to gender

roles and relationships in the Christian community of faith will be interpreted through an eschatological lens that seeks to derive praxis from the Bible's teleology as a safeguard against perpetuating the cultural forms in which the Bible's message is embedded. The eschatological picture is not complete, but it is helpful in determining the direction and destination of any redemptive movement within the Bible, and in guiding our interpretation of difficult texts on gender roles in the community of faith. To approach difficult Biblical texts on gender roles and relationships using the consummation of redemption as the interpretative crux seems more helpful, and fundamentally more biblical than interpreting them in isolation from the movement and direction which is apparent within the canon of Scripture.

Through the lens of this inaugurated eschatology I will argue that, as Jesus taught his disciples, our prayer is to be, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven". If the church is the agent of the Kingdom, what does this mean for our praxis, particularly in the area of gender roles and relationships? The final chapter will examine the practical implications of the eschatological egalitarianism proposed by this research. I will also comment on broader issues that this research touches on, particularly hermeneutics and theological method.

Finally, as far as method is concerned, I find O'Regan's (2001:10ff) approach helpful, although I certainly lack the sophistication of his application. In describing his method he contrasts two approaches, Descartes' *Discourse on Method*, and Sartre's *Search for a Method*. Descartes approach was to find a foundation of absolute certainty from which to establish reliable knowledge. Sartre's text, directed against the foundationalism of Descartes and others, claims that method cannot function apodictically; method is

incontestably *a posteriori*. In this research, reflections on method will therefore be a retrospective postscript and an invitation to further exploration of the issues.

There are a number of starting points which, in confluence, contribute to the genesis of this paper. They are, first of all, the canon of Scripture, secondly my commitment to its authority for faith and life and my vocation of expounding its message as relevant for life in the twenty first century, and thirdly, the context of a postmodern world with its attendant systems of belief and thought. From this starting point, a survey of relevant literature creates a conversation between the different voices that have sought to add to our understanding of the Bible as God's word, and of this mystery of male and female created in God's image.

CHAPTER ONE

HERMENEUTICS, FEMINISM, AND IDEOLOGICAL CONFLICT

1.1 Introduction

The current gender debate within Evangelical Christianity takes place within a multifaceted broader context of social change and a paradigm shift in western thinking. While it seems somewhat optimistic to expect those outside of Evangelical Christianity to engage with its internal debates, which may seem entirely superfluous to them, it is important for Evangelicals to be aware of the broader context in which their debate takes place. This chapter will start by examining this broader context of hermeneutics and the development of feminist theology. The scope of this paper does not permit deep interaction with these, but even a superficial engagement with them exposes some of the ideological conflicts, which underlie and drive the debate within Evangelical Christianity.

1.2 The Hermeneutical Context

A brief examination of some of the significant developments in the field of hermeneutics, and the role they have played in changing the way that the Bible is approached and interpreted, will be helpful in understanding feminist theology, as well as providing something of a context for William J. Webb's hermeneutical model. Within the scope of this paper it is impossible to begin to deal with the complexities and nuances of post-structuralist thought, critical theory, postmodernism and a host of related subjects. However, some examination of these issues and concepts is needed to understand why

widely divergent approaches to interpreting texts exist, and why these different approaches give rise to such different interpretations of texts dealing with gender roles in the Christian faith community.

1.2.1 The Hermeneutical Paradigm Shift

The dominant Historical Critical model of interpreting Scripture that emerged from the Enlightenment has been critiqued and dismantled over the past 50 years or so. Barton (1998:7f) provides an overview of historical approaches to the Bible. Historical criticism tends to be concerned with discovering the original meaning of the text by placing texts in their historical context through historical reconstructions, asking questions about how or when a text was written and to whom it was written. This was congruent with Schleiermacher's assertion that the task of hermeneutics was to discover the author's intent. However, the reconstructions of historical criticism were often subject to rationalistic assumptions and were the product of scientific positivism (for example Julius Wellhausen, D.F. Strauss, Ernest Renan). This gave lie to historical criticism's claim that it was value-neutral or disinterested.

The possibility of an objective or value-neutral reading of texts, including the Bible, has been critiqued by a number of significant thinkers. Feuerbach anticipated Nietzsche in his view that any idea of "God" that wasn't recognized as a human construct diminished humanity and hindered the creativity of the individual. Feuerbach (1989:14) argued that God was essentially a projection of "purified" human attributes, a projected construction of human values and beliefs.

Karl Marx (1970:51) wrote, "It is not men's consciousness which determines their existence, but on the contrary their social existence which determines their

consciousness”. Karl Marx had a negative view of theism. He saw it as a means of pacifying the proletariat in order to keep them subservient to the interests of the powerful.

The work of Freud (2003) portrayed people as driven by an interplay of forces, and therefore having enormous capacity to fall victim to self-deceptive, self-protective and manipulative strategies. Freud’s emphasis on self-deception is congruent with Christian theology, which views humanity as falling victim to forces that it cannot fully understand or control.

Nietzsche was first to expose the role of self-deception in inauthentic religion. He (1967:327) offered the observation, “Ultimately, man finds in things nothing but what he himself has imported into them”, leading to his conclusion (1967:481) that there are no facts, only interpretations. There is continuity of thought from Nietzsche to Heidegger, with his notion of “situatedness” (1962:79-80), his proposal that humans are always caught up in a set of concerns and interests (1962:137), and his adoption of Nietzsche’s concept of the “will to power”.

Georg Gadamer was both a student of and a contemporary to Heidegger. Gadamer (2004) sought to challenge and correct the over-confidence that looks for understanding from the place of individual self-consciousness, which is limited in its scope to a single point in time. Inevitably this leads to the imposition of a prior conceptual grid on the text and an illusory “understanding” which only serves to confirm the assumptions that were the starting point.

Paul Ricoeur (1970:93) drew on the work of the “masters of suspicion”, Nietzsche,

Marx, and particularly Freud. He (1970:27) stressed the need for a hermeneutic of suspicion because of the fallibility of the human will and the human tendency towards of self-deception. Jurgens Habermas (1973:9), another significant contributor to the field of hermeneutics, used of the term, “interest” to describe the predisposition of readers to impose their agendas on texts.

The result of this formidable critique of the possibility of objective knowledge was that within the field of biblical studies historical criticism gave way to an interest in the Bible as literature. Literary approaches examine the relationships between and within texts of literature. Meaning was seen as something intrinsic to the text itself, generated by the system of language. Structuralist approaches saw the text as an independent world of literary, semantic, and linguistic influences. Thiselton (2006:610) describes how eventually this notion of an autonomous text also came to be seen as an illusion. He argues that this led to structuralism collapsing into post-structuralism and formalism into reader-response theory. This locates meaning, not behind the text, as with historical criticism, or within the text, as with formalism and structuralism, but in front of the text in the response of the reader.

One of the most significant contributors to this approach is contemporary French philosopher, Jacques Derrida. Derrida followed De Saussure in claiming that meaning is a function of the difference between signs. For de Saussure (1959:66) a word is not a link between a thing and its name, but between a concept (signified) and a sound pattern (signifier). A sign doesn't gain its meaning from the thing it refers to, but by its difference from other signs. Since all language is self-referential, meaning is always indeterminate. Since meaning and consciousness do not exist outside of language, all meaning is temporary and relative – the self-referential play

of indeterminate signifiers. Meaning is differential, not referential. Everything is therefore part of the text, or to use Derrida's (1976:158) words, "There is nothing outside the text". Everything is part of the signifying system, and there is therefore no independent ground of meaning beyond particular language systems. There is no point of view outside of the self-referential, contingent play of language.

Derrida (1976:2ff) directed a vigorous attack against what he calls "logocentrism", the idea that there is some stable point outside language that can ensure one's words, and the system of distinctions that we use to order our experience of life, correspond to the world. He regarded logocentrism as a powerful form of ethnocentrism. Among these hermeneutical non-realists there is a fear of the authoritarianism that arises if there is one correct meaning. The hierarchies that philosophy sets up, such as truth/falsehood, philosophy/literature, straight/gay are really power structures. For those who hold to a non-representational concept of language, logocentrism is a form of exclusion and repression.

Based on Derrida's assertion that meaning is always absent from the sign because it is located in the difference between signs, he argued (1976:158ff) that adding an author as a "signature" to a sign cannot control a text's meaning because it does not prevent the reader from misunderstanding it.

Roland Barthes took this approach so far as to speak of the "death of the author". Barthes (1995:129) writes, "To give a text an author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the meaning". Barthes criticized the attempts of readers to focus on the author of a text and attempt to discover as much about the author as possible to assist in determining the meaning of the text.

Since we can never determine exactly what an author intended, the text needs to be freed from its creator and thus from interpretive “tyranny”. The meaning of a text lies in its audience not its author. For Barthes (1986:54), this refusal to assign a fixed meaning to the world or to texts is the liberation of a “countertheological” activity in which God is finally refused.

Working within these assumptions, Jean Francois Lyotard (1984) developed a social deconstructionism that was highly suspicious of metanarratives and sought to reveal the social construction of meaning and “objectivity”. Michel Foucault (1979; 1999) further suggested that all interactions are really expressions of power relations with specific strategies for claiming legitimacy, contributing to a postmodern view of the self as a site of conflicting “discourses” that are all predetermined by social construction and none participating in any overarching truth.

Rorty (1991:1) sees language as a way of developing habits of action for coping with reality rather than “getting reality right”. Hermeneutics is not a way of knowing, it is simply a way of coping. There is no “truth” there are only conversations that hope for some kind of pragmatic progress, with progress being defined by what seems best for some local community. In the absence of anything worthwhile to aim for it settles for a bland, culturally specific pragmatism based on technological progress and values compatible with the ‘American dream’. Thiselton (2006:641) questions the value of this approach, “Can a philosophy with no ultimates beyond the welfare of ‘people like us’ sustain justice and hope in a world as complex as that of the twenty-first century?”.

Stanley Fish applied Rorty's pragmatism to literary texts. Fish (1980:13) argues that when we read, the text ceases to be an entity that is independent of interpretation, and it is replaced by new texts that are the result of our interpretive activities. As such, we can never know the text as an independent entity, only the texts that readers produce through their interpretation. Fish (1980:335) has also been pivotal in pointing out the role of communities in interpretation. He argues that the self does not exist apart from the communal categories of thought that enable it to function. Fish points out that the reader is part of an interpretive community that dictates how texts should be read, and in which the reader has been socially and culturally conditioned to respond to texts in certain ways. All communication is interpreted within these culturally derived assumptions.

Deconstruction peels away the historical, ideological and rhetorical layers of ideas and texts, in order to expose their arbitrary linguistic nature. Our language system creates distinctions and structures that are arbitrary and artificial. Adam (1995:29) describes how this operates, "Identity (the archfoundation of all our philosophical and theological foundations) is constructed when people decide that certain distinctions make a difference and others do not".

Deconstructive approaches such as those described above conclude that metanarratives, or belief systems that claim to provide a total explanation of reality are merely socially constructed attempts to exercise control. That in presenting this they fail to adequately deconstruct the metanarrative they have just created seems glaringly obvious! There also appears to be an assumption within deconstructionism that societies are inherently oppressive. This assumption

emerges from their concurrence with Nietzsche's contention that human life and culture are merely expressions of a will to power.

The political agenda behind deconstructionism is to liberate texts from the coercive and oppressive dominant interpretations of the past. Against the logocentrism of those who claim to speak from a privileged perspective, it is pointed out that the values this group attempts to impose are the arbitrary values of the socially, sexually and intellectually prejudiced power brokers. Foucault (1979:159) writes, "The author is ... the ideological figure by which one masks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning".

The primary concern of much of the philosophical thought described above is encapsulated within Joseph Margolis' question (1995:18), "Does reality have an invariant structure, or is everything in a state of flux?". For Margolis, what we think of as reality is really the result of our linguistic practices. Everything is an interpretation or construct, whether it is a country, or the institution of marriage, or the idea of a God.

This shift in how both meaning and the interpretive task are construed has had profound implications for theology. Dunn (2003:93) suggests that the main impact of postmodernism has been to call into question the traditional hegemony of the author, thereby freeing texts from their original context and making the reader central in the interpretive process. This is described succinctly in Stephen Moore's (1989:121) words, referring to its impact on biblical criticism, "Prior to the interpretive act, there is nothing definitive in the text to be discovered". Moore (1989:119-31) points out that as a result, for the deconstructionist critic, there is no

text, only a series of infinitely different interpretations, with the result that texts fall into an epistemological abyss.

These developments in the way texts in general are approached have had a significant impact on the way the Bible is viewed and interpreted. First, it must take its place alongside any and all other stories in the marketplace of belief. It has no special authority, merely interest as an example of how previous communities of faith have constructed meaning. Second, the idea that meaning is not constrained by the text, but determined by the reader creates a situation where the text effectively becomes redundant. It becomes a blank sheet onto which we project our preferences and prejudices. Any hope for coherence in communication or theological discourse is also lost.

1.2.2 Implications and Evaluation

Does all language actually function the way post-structuralist critics claim it does? John Barton (1998:17) writes that postmodernism has banished the expression “really means” to outer darkness, and in doing that it labels any style of academic enquiry for which it is still regarded as usable as hopelessly naïve. He (1998:17) then points out that, “In all sorts of contexts we operate quite uncomplicatedly with the idea that words have definite meanings, and postmodernists do the same when they read everyday texts: instruction booklets that come with household equipment, legal documents, personal letters conveying information, shopping lists or cookery books”. The fact that the Bible contains texts of similar genres should not escape our attention.

As the authors of *The Meaning of Meaning* point out, language is the most

important instrument of civilization, and if there is nothing in what we say to one another we lose the primary means for cultivating humanity (Ogden & Richards 1989:xviii). Vanhoozer (1998:19) makes the point that implicit in the questions about meaning are questions about the nature of reality, the possibility of knowledge, and the criteria for morality. He (1998:47) defines hermeneutical realism as the position that believes meaning to be prior to and independent of the process of interpretation. He (1998:57) points out the implications of hermeneutical non-realism, “all the significant distinctions that make a meaningful world out of human experience are, in the final analysis, linguistic creations”.

Vanhoozer (1998:47) argues that it is precisely because they have authors that texts don't mean just anything. The author's intention, insofar as we can recover it, must control our interpretation. Hirsch (1967:4), an advocate of the authority of the author makes the point that words alone don't mean something; people mean something with words. He writes, “A word sequence means nothing in particular until somebody... means something by it”.

Deconstructionism's incredulity towards the possibility of texts having a single, coherent meaning at any level seems to lead to the loss of the possibility of any real communication of intention. Language is the main tool humans use to build interpersonal relationships. Indeed, I would argue that relationships are built around disclosure and knowledge. The loss of meaning therefore has consequences for the possibility of authentic relationship.

The interpretation of the texts of the books of the Bible determines one's identity as a Christian. This means that to be an authentic Christian one needs to attempt, as

best one can, to recover the original meaning of the biblical authors, and in doing that to discover the mind of God. Derrida rightfully recognizes the limits of human reason, and also the implications of Nietzsche's "death of god" in that it leads to the loss of the knowing subject. However, as Brian Ingrassia (1995:224) has pointed out, the death of god that underpins deconstruction is the death of the god of the philosophers, not the God revealed in Jesus Christ.

The redemptive-movement hermeneutic that William Webb proposes offers new possibilities for identifying those elements of the Bible that reflect the cultural practices and prejudices of their community of origin rather than God's intentions for the way humans should live. Webb's model also provides impetus to move beyond oppressive interpretations and the practices that are their result. He does this without surrendering to either complete arbitrariness of interpretation and indeterminacy of meaning, or to naïve literalism.

1.3 Feminism

The debate over gender roles in the church has been prompted and stimulated by the development of feminist thought and theology. Feminism has provided a critique of patriarchal structures, and the readings of texts that are used to legitimate these structures.

1.3.1 The Rise of Feminism

I am indebted to Rosemary Radford Ruether's article, *The Emergence of Christian Feminist Theology* (2002) for what follows in this section.

Ruether (1992:15) describes how humanism, which had its roots in the Renaissance, initially failed to critique traditional gender roles, but certainly planted seeds that were nurtured by the critical thinking of the Enlightenment. Values of the fundamental equality and dignity of all human beings, which arose from the Enlightenment, resulted in the revision of social norms. In the 18th and 19th centuries, revolutionary liberalism and socialism attacked the dominance of the aristocracy and those with capital; although they did not specifically address gender issues, they provided insights that would give impetus to a drive for equal rights for women. Kassian (1992:15) suggests that the first wave of feminism began in the late 1700's with Mary Wollstonecraft's publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. This was followed by similar publications, *The Rights of Women*, by Olympe de Gouges in France, and Judith Sargent Murray's *On the Equality of the Sexes* in Massachusetts.

By the mid nineteenth century organised movements seeking equal rights for women in areas like education, property ownership and politics had emerged. In the same period, the abolition of slavery fuelled the first systematic attempts to challenge male dominance in Christian theology.

Ruether (2002:6) notes the contributions of Sarah Grimke, Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton in the nineteenth century. By the early twentieth century there was a degree of emancipation of women in more liberal societies such as those of the USA and England. Women were given the vote, property rights and greater access to education. These advances were, however, constrained by the reality of a gender based division of labour and social norms that dictated male dominated family structures. Due to factors that do not seem to be fully understood

or agreed upon, the movement for women's equality dissipated in the early twentieth century.

A key thinker in the resurrection of women's issues into the arena of public discourse was Simone de Beauvoir, whose two volume work, *The Second Sex*, was first published in 1949. de Beauvoir had a lifelong relationship with Jean Paul Sartre. Kassian (1992:17) suggests that the model she proposed for male female interaction was heavily influenced by Sartre's existentialist philosophy, which put forward the idea of the complete freedom of the individual, necessitating the acceptance of full responsibility for acts and decisions in a purposeless world. Kassian (1992:18) argues that central to de Beauvoir's thesis that women had been given a second-class status in the world is her contention that men had named and defined the world in a way that defined the world as male, and by doing this they had robbed women of their autonomy. De Beauvoir saw hope for women in the Soviet Revolution and its socialism.

Kassian (1992:21) adds that the contribution of Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique* in 1963, along with de Beauvoir's writing, provided a base for the modern feminist movement. Friedan identified a discrepancy between the reality of women's lives and the image they were trying to conform to, and argued that this had led to a problem of identity in which women had lost the capacity to grow or transcend the present.

By the 1960's, Liberal and Marxist critiques of both society and thought had gained support. Ruether (2002:7) describes how the civil rights and anti-war movements in the USA led to a critique of the racial and class patterns that defined American

society, as well as its militarism. This supported the emergence of a more fully developed feminism. Ruether (2002:7) goes on to describe how, following the critique of racial and class patterns within American society, women of the political left responded to the chauvinism of their male counterparts with a radical feminism aimed at transformed social and sexual relations.

Kassian (1992:23) describes how the feminist writer, Kate Millet, began to use the word “patriarchy” to describe “the problem without a name” in the late 1960’s. Patriarchy, or “the rule of the father”, was thus identified as the ultimate cause of injustices against women. Adrienne Rich (1976:57-8) explains this idea,

“Patriarchy is the power of the fathers: a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men – by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette education, and the division of labour – determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male”.

Ruether (2002:3) describes Feminism as, “A critical stance that challenges the patriarchal gender paradigm that associates males with human characteristics defined as superior or dominant (rationality, power) and females with those defined as inferior and auxiliary (intuition, passivity).” She adds (2002:3) that “Most feminists reconstruct the gender paradigm in order to include women in full and equal humanity, a few feminists reverse it, making females morally superior and males prone to evil.”

1.3.2 Feminism and the Church

It was unavoidable for the church and Christianity to escape feminist critique.

Feminist theology takes feminist critique and reconstruction into the theological realm by questioning patterns that justify things such as exclusive male language for God, the idea that men are designated by God to be leaders in church and family, and that females are created to be subordinate to males. Within the context of the development of feminism as described previously, Ruether (2002:7) describes how feminist theology emerged after the ordination of women (mainline denominations had begun ordaining women from the mid 1800's) had brought more and more women into theological seminaries. By the 1960's women had benefited from better access to education, been exposed to these liberal and Marxist critiques of society and religion, and were beginning to occupy positions of influence as teachers, ministers and theologians.

1.3.3 Feminism and Christian Theology

According to Ruether (2002:7), women began to critique traditions that had historically excluded them on a theological basis, and to critique theology itself. Significant feminist theologians that rose to prominence in the USA in the late 1960's are Mary Daly, Rosemary Ruether and Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza.

Of these, Schussler Fiorenza and Ruether have remained Christian feminist theologians, while Mary Daly eventually radically rejected Christianity, describing her position in *Beyond God the Father* (1974). Daly (1974:19) summed up her critique of Christianity with the much quoted phrase, "if God is male, male is God". She (1974:19) goes on to state that, "The divine patriarch castrates women as long as he lives on in the human imagination". For Daly, the ideas of "God" and "man" are so intermingled that they are impossible to separate and feminism must, of necessity, be post-Christian and anti-church.

Other feminist theologians have followed her rejection of Christianity, many into what Carol Christ (2002:79) calls “post-traditional *thealogy*”, which seeks to recover elements of pre-Christian religions and goddess worship. Influential writers here include Naomi Goldenberg (1980), Starhawk (Miriam Simos) (1986), Charlene Spretnak (1991), and Zsuzsanna Budapest (1990), the founder of the Wicca movement, who wrote a lesbian-feminist spiritual manifesto, which sought alternative symbols from ancient goddess worship. Carol Christ (2002:80) describes how this branch of feminist theology overlaps with neo-pagan, witchcraft and Wiccan traditions.

Feminist theology overlaps with pro-choice activism’s defence of women’s rights to choose abortions as an expression of autonomy, and with what could generically be described as Gay rights movements. A significant expression of the latter is Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, who self-identifies as an “evangelical lesbian feminist” (1993). Mollenkott attempts to reconcile her gender and her sexual orientation with a commitment to the authority of the Bible.

1.3.4 Feminism and the Bible

There is a relationship between mainstream Feminist theology and the Bible, which can at best be described as mutually uncomfortable. Feminist theologians who have remained within the Christian tradition have, according to Mary Ann Tolbert (1983:121-4), generally taken one of three broad approaches to the Bible. In the first she uses Rosemary Radford Ruether as an example of a liberationist approach which discovers a “prophetic liberating tradition” in the record of biblical faith from Exodus to Jesus and then uses it as the norm by which other biblical texts are evaluated. A second approach, typified by Phyllis Trible looks for texts that are

neglected by patriarchal hermeneutics and seeks to uncover hidden countercultural messages in the text. A third approach moves beyond the canon and tries to hear the voices of women in other texts from the period of the early church. From these it attempts to extrapolate or “hear” the “silenced voices” of women in the early church.

1.3.5 Feminist Hermeneutics

The role of hermeneutics in feminist biblical interpretation had its roots in the publication of Elizabeth Stanton Cady’s *The Women’s Bible* in 1895; it proposed thorough investigation of the Bible as the cause of women’s enslavement to a patriarchal religion.

There is no single, uniform approach to hermeneutics within feminist theology. While historical, literary and social science approaches are all used, common to most approaches is what Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza (1984:107-8) calls a hermeneutic of suspicion. By this she means a suspicion of a patriarchal system of thinking in which women are often excluded from the symbolic, public, and social forms of communication, and by which femaleness has been devalued and frequently reduced to the role of victim.

Schussler Fiorenza (1992:4) rejects what she calls the doctrinal approach to biblical interpretation, which insists on the verbal inspiration and literal-historical inerrancy of the Bible, for understanding biblical revelation and authority in a-historical and dogmatic terms. Schussler Fiorenza (1992:5) also critiques what she calls positivist historical exegesis, declaring its goal of an, “understanding of exegesis and historiography that is positivist, factual, objective, and value-free” to

be “theoretically impossible”. She draws on reader-response models of hermeneutics to emphasize the interaction between the text and the interpreter or community, as well as the hermeneutics of liberation theology, in developing her approach to interpretation. She writes (1992:6),

“The various forms of liberation theology have challenged the so-called objectivity and value-neutrality of academic theology. The basic insight of all liberation theologies, including feminist theology, is the recognition that all theology, willingly or not, is by definition always engaged for or against the oppressed. Intellectual neutrality is not possible in a world of exploitation and oppression”.

Marie Sabin (1999:2) notes the development in Schussler Fiorenza’s hermeneutics of suspicion. She suggests that in the beginning Schussler Fiorenza’s “suspicion” was that women had played a substantial role at the beginning of Christianity and the hermeneutic was aimed at recovering this history. However, this suspicion developed in a way where it became increasingly skeptical about whether there was anything worth recovering. Sabin refers to Schussler Fiorenza’s 1998 book, *Sharing Her Word* as an example of this. Schussler Fiorenza (1998:90) writes, “A hermeneutics of suspicion does not have the task of unearthing or uncovering historical or theological truth but of disentangling the ideological workings of andro-kyriocentric language”. Sabin (1999:2) comments on this, “In short, she has moved from crediting the text with some intrinsic worth that should be respected, to seeing it only as a set of politically charged words which she is free to remold and manipulate as she pleases”. The factors that control the remoulding and manipulation of the text are illuminated by Schussler Fiorenza (1998:106) when

she approvingly cites Alicia Suskin Ostriker's "hermeneutics of desire," and defines it to mean "you see what you want to see".

Gilfillan Upton (2002:99) writes that most feminist biblical studies have a critique of patriarchy as their starting point and note how biblical interpretation in the West has been characterized by patriarchal bias at every level. Mary Ann Tolbert (1983:119) defines feminist hermeneutics as, "a reading of the text in the light of oppressive structures of patriarchal society". This has led her (1983:124) to question whether, given the patriarchal nature of the Bible, it is still possible to stay within the Christian tradition. Questions such as this have led to a significant number of feminists rejecting the Bible as a hopelessly patriarchal text that is beyond usefulness or redemption.

For those who remain within the Christian tradition, doing so necessitates a re-examination and a critique of the way the Bible has been interpreted. Ruether (1983:18-19) describes the guiding criteria for this, "Whatever diminishes or denies the full humanity of women must be presumed not to reflect the divine or an authentic relation to the divine, or to reflect the authentic nature of things, or to be the message or work of an authentic redeemer or a community of redemption".

Trinitarian language of 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit' has been particularly problematic for feminist theologians. It has been seen to reinforce hierarchy and enshrine the maleness of God. Soskice (2002:141) explains that one approach has been to "desexualize" the language of the Trinity and replace the traditional terms with words like Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer. Soskice (2002:142) goes on to

argue that the Trinity has been the means by which “unacceptable” inferences from the language of the New Testament has been put in place.

Where “positive” motifs have been discerned in Scripture, such as Wisdom/Sophia, or maternal images of God, these are appropriated by feminist theology. There has also been a feminising of the Spirit; Nicola Slee (2002:183) traces the roots of this to Semitic and Syrian traditions that developed maternal imagery of the Spirit in scripture, and notes recent examples such as Congar’s naming of the Spirit as the feminine person in God, Boff’s association of the Spirit with Mary as the maternal face of God, Gelpi’s use of the Spirit as a feminine archetype in his theology of “Holy Breath”, and Marriage’s concept of the Spirit as “the mother who lets us go”. This type of approach has been condemned by writers like Sarah Coakley (1988:124ff) on the basis that the overall structures remain androcentric, with the female person or principle subordinate to a dominant male.

With the difficulties posed by a sacred text that was written within and reflects a patriarchal system, there has been a move away from the Bible as authoritative, and into feminist spirituality that may be both highly political and focussed on praxis (Rosemary Ruether), or a more mystical spirituality with a focus on the goddess (Zsuzsanna Budapest). Carol Christ (1979:273-87) describes different ways that this is expressed. One is the goddess as the divine female, which is expressed in culture and invoked in prayer and ritual, another is the goddess as a symbol of “life, death and rebirth energy in nature and culture”, and another is the goddess as affirmation of female power.

The trends in hermeneutics discussed earlier have allowed feminist interpreters to

avoid the difficulties posed by texts within the Bible by dislocating meaning from the text and locating it in their own experience. Writing from a post-Christian perspective, Carol Christ (2002:83) points out that while, “The source and norm for traditional theologies is revealed tradition... and rational thought which reflects on revealed tradition. ...Goddess thealogy, like feminist theology more generally, begins in women’s experience”. In the same way Parsons (2002:118) argues that, “for feminist theology to begin with experience means to enter into a rigorous process of discernment, in which one’s experiences are tested for their authenticity. Experiences are not of equal worth”.

Parsons’ statement highlights the absolute subjectivity of much feminist interpretation, yet at the same time hints at the existence of feminism’s attempt to create a new hegemony of values by which the “worth” of experience is assessed. One cannot evade the reality of subjectivity in the process of interpretation; the question is whether one must simply succumb to subjectivity in a way that effectively obliterates meaning, or whether a more positive engagement is possible. Where a text such as the Bible is considered normative for identity and practice, the text surely has to be greater freedom to speak to the context, and to shape theology – even where it is done from the bottom up.

1.3.6 Evangelical Feminism

Not all Feminist theologians have been pessimistic in their view of the Bible’s authority and ongoing relevance. Within the evangelical church, feminist writers such as Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty sought to express an evangelical approach in their 1986 book, *All We’re Meant to Be*. They avoided the radical critique of the Bible found in much feminist theology and instead affirmed it’s

adequacy for women's liberation. This approach is still used by authors such as Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (2004) and others.

1.3.7 Feminist Eschatology

This significant emphasis in feminist theology must be noted, because it presents an alternative understanding of eschatology to the one put forward in this research. Following the emancipation movements of the nineteenth century and the development of feminism as a distinct social and cultural force in the 1970's, there has been a further wave of feminist thinking which has allied feminism with radical ecology. The French writer, Françoise d'Eubonne, pioneered this approach in 1974. It explores the relationship between women and nature within the framework of feminism's critique of patriarchy, and calls for political action to liberate both of these oppressed entities. Eco-feminism takes feminism's emphasis on praxis and then combines it with the politics of radical ecology to create an approach to the future, or an eschatology, which is distinctive.

Feminist theologians, Sallie McFague (1993:197-212) and Rosemary Radford Ruether (1990:111-24), view eschatology from a perspective that rejects an unrealised future eschatology in favour of an eschatology that focuses on the present. What is most significant about their view of eschatology is their shift in focus away from humanity as the focus to creation. Humanity is merely an interdependent component of creation. This realized eschatology, with its focus on creation, is expressed in what these authors call "ecofeminism". Ecofeminist eschatology is concerned with ecological sustainability, where the future consists of a recovery of the earth's unspoilt past through a symbiotic relationship between humanity and nature. While, ecofeminism's focus on creation in the present is to be

welcomed, Valerie Karras (2002:245) questions this vision of the present based on an idealised past, along with its underlying premise of reformation rather than transformation.

Karras (2002:248) acknowledges that ecofeminism's understanding of the cosmos as the body of God rightly places our existence as humans within the broader network of creation, but argues that it inverts the order and in doing that makes the cosmos, and by implication humanity, normative in and of itself.

The panentheism of much eco-feminism leaves humanity with the unenviable task of first pulling ourselves up by our own shoelaces through the development of a new consciousness, then optimistically hoping that this will have sufficient momentum in and of itself to impact the cosmos.

Parsons' (2002:130) words uncover the hollowness and evasiveness of this vision,

“One feature of the postmodern world that renders this understanding of redemption inadequate is that its efforts are already co-opted by the market economy. We can purchase ‘the natural’ at the corner shop, tested for cruelty to animals and legitimated as a non-exploitative product, so that this fine holistic vision appears now only as a repetition, and not a redemption, of the very Disneyfied world out of which it comes”.

The eschatology of eco-feminism, while laudable in many of its objectives, tends to be powerless in the face of the real power structures of this world, because from a theological point of view all it seems to rest on is a naïve cosmology and a somewhat optimistic anthropology. The hope offered by eco-feminism is nothing

more than a chimera because the theological foundation of the hope has been completely divorced from the authority of the text. This fundamental question has to be asked about hope, for it to remain biblical hope in any real sense: what guarantees the hope? Thiselton (2006:640) astutely asks the question that if the author is dead, who is doing the promising? Who is forgiving? He adds, “If, as we suggest, the Bible is a love-letter from the heart of God, to read ‘I love you’ as the words of a dead or anonymous lover would destroy this act of love and transpose it into a tragedy”.

We return to our critique of feminist hermeneutics here. When meaning, and perhaps authority, are located entirely in the reader they become wholly inadequate as a substantial basis for faith, and for any hope beyond what the reader is able to bring about through their own strategies and devices.

1.4 The Ideological Context

The debate over gender roles in the church is taking place within a context of what I perceive to be ideological “power struggles” that are significant for those engaging with feminist perspectives from an Evangelical Christian perspective, which holds a view of the Bible as authoritative for both faith and life.

1.4.1 Neo-paganism and Monism

The debate over gender roles in the Evangelical Christian faith community is taking place within a broader debate that could even be called a clash of worldviews. Peter Jones (1997:15ff) describes what he calls the “religious left” in western society, a broad group that has in common certain features such as a rejection of

authority, a rejection of biblical norms and morals, and the search for a new spirituality. Jones (1997:24) suggests that the real enemy of the Christian faith is no longer atheistic humanism, but revived pagan religion. He argues (1997:25) that despite the diversity of religious thought within this religious left, there is a common core of monism that gives the movement coherence. The essence of monism is that all is one and one is all. God does not stand above and outside of the universe, rather, God is the universe. Therefore humanity is an expression of divine oneness; all religions are one, and the one problem humanity faces is the splintering of reality into opposing camps. According to Jones (1997:26ff), monism rejects distinctions between good and evil, truth and error, right and wrong, human and animal, male and female, homosexual and heterosexual, orthodoxy and heresy, reason and irrationality.

In *Worldview, Language, and Radical Feminism: An Evangelical Appraisal*, Steven M. Smith (1992:260) expresses a similar idea to Jones, but describes it as a clash of worldviews. He suggests that within theology the clash is between traditional theists and religious monists. He (1992:261) describes this in terms of a fourfold outline of these worldviews:

“Classical theism affirms a transcendent Creator who is revealed in Jesus, the incarnate Son of God. This worldview is based on the beliefs that Jesus died for sinners and rose again (reality), that humanity is fallen (identity), that there is transcultural moral structure (morality), and that there is a hope of heaven and a danger of hell (destiny). Religious monism holds the identity of the creator with the creation in that nothing exists outside of God (reality). ... Jesus is at the most the most perfectly actualized human, that humanity is not

fallen but is ignorant and unfulfilled (identity), that morality is relativistic and experiential (morality), and that there is hope of self-actualization (destiny)”.

Smith (1992:162-9) substantiates this from J.A.T. Robinson’s *Honest to God* and John Selby Spong’s *Living in Sin?*, highlighting their respective understandings of God as something we project or define ourselves. From this basis, the naming of God is simply an expression of the male will to power, and the language of God, the Father in heaven must be replaced because it hinders human self-actualization. He points out (1992:270f) that in *Models of God*, Sally McFague, the feminist theologian is even more explicit in arguing for a worldview that is “monist and perhaps most precisely designated as panentheistic”. McFague’s Jesus is a religious monist who was opposed to dualisms and hierarchies, and the cosmos is God’s body.

Monist tendencies are evident in Ruether’s anthropology (1992), which sees God’s multifaceted and diverse original intention for humanity having been distorted by an evil dualism that limits human freedom by imposing a binary polarity that is false and destructive. Parsons (2002:125) explains this predicament further, “To be a woman, as to be a man, is to be trapped in identities put upon us by cultural and linguistic convention”.

The monism of McFague and other feminist theologians is self-defeating as it must surely present a strong disincentive for the kind of praxis they promote. How can one oppose evil, whether it is individual or structural, when that evil is by definition an expression of God? McFague’s construction of God seems powerless to help her with her ambitious project of addressing the social and ecological problems of

our times because her “God” is by definition a projection of her own preferences, and unlike a God who is transcendent and other, McFague’s God has inherent limitations and weaknesses that are identical with her own and those of humanity in general.

1.4.2 Panentheism

A fairly developed panentheism is seen in the writing of Susan Griffin (1984) and Carol Christ (1999). For Christ, particularly, ideas such as Goddess, Earth and Life are all symbols for the whole of which we are all part. Grace Jantzen takes this further in her book, *God’s World: God’s Body* (1984), where she presents the idea that the earth is God’s body. Jantzen (1984:134) explicitly rejects the idea that matter is outside of God, suggesting that all of creation is an expression of who God is. In more recent writing, Jantzen (1999:269) suggests that pantheism is the most helpful way of understanding God. Following her absolute rejection of any kind of dualism, Jantzen tends to merge male and female gender categories and characteristics into each other in a manner typical of Monist thinking.

This identification of God and creation stands in opposition to traditional understandings of the incarnation. Jesus Christ loses his distinctiveness from every other human being because all share in the nature of God in the same way. From this, whatever Christ does or doesn’t do becomes largely irrelevant, except as some kind of example. It certainly becomes impossible to conceive of God’s love as something other than the love of people.

Both Spretnak (1991:290) and Mollenkott (1993:78) directly acknowledge the influence of Matthew Fox, a Dominican theologian and writer. Fox (1940:121-23,

137, 140) takes the panentheism of the Greek Fathers and combines it with the thought of other mystics such as Meister Eckhart and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. He combines this with various Hindu and Buddhist sources, as well as drawing quite heavily on Carl Jung. Fox (1940:50) expresses his panentheism with statements such as, “God is in all things and all things are in God” and “God is not outside of us. We are in God and God is in us”. Fox (1940:137) further contends that all humans are divine. Fox (1940:136) ultimately calls for the removal of all dualisms and distinctions (God and the world, male and female, heterosexual and homosexual etc.) and thereby, the elimination of all hierarchies.

There is a fundamental difference between studying a God who is personal and distinct from creation, and studying a god who is a human construction, and who can be deconstructed and reconstructed to fit our preferences. The latter could more properly be called a study of self, as having disposed of the text of Scripture through philosophical sleight of hand, feminism is left with nothing more than its own projection of the kind of Freudian neuroses on which it based its critique. There is no basis for authentic faith or hope. There is really nothing left at all.

1.4.3 Gnosticism

Morphew (2009:71-75) demonstrates feminism’s roots in Gnostic thought, and highlights the neo-Platonic and Gnostic ideas within Mollenkott’s writing in particular. Morphew (2009:79-82) draws on Cyril O’Regan’s work on the recycling of Valentinian Gnosticism in Jacob Boehme to expose the general methodology of Fox and those who follow him. Morphew’s view is that Fox reconstructs the story of Jesus Christ by dislocating it completely from history and turning it into a quest for a new stage in human consciousness.

The work of O'Regan (2001, 2002) on Boehme is significant in understanding the revival of the ancient heresy of Gnosticism in modern texts. O'Regan (2001:3) argues for the presence of Valentinian Gnosticism in the work of Jacob Boehme, its subsequent transmission to Hegel, and with that to a line of Protestant discourses that radically, transgressively revise the Christian narrative. The Christian story is deliberately disfigured and made into a completely different story. Both Boehme and Hegel have been influential in the development of feminism; for example, Rosemary Radford Ruether's respect for Boehme is described in her introduction to *Womanguides* (1985). Mollenkott (1993:23) acknowledges the formative influence of Ralph Waldo Emerson's neo-Platonism and of Idealism.

Working within the fields of literary theory and literary criticism, O'Regan uses the word, "haunting" to describe the return of a discourse (that was assumed to be dead) in a form that is both the same as and different to the original. He uses the term "derangement" for the hermeneutical process which is the method of modern Gnosticism. He (2001:12) writes, "In the case of derangement, one discourse (biblical) is deregulated by another and submitted to new rules of organization (essentially a different narrative grammar)". He (2001:17) goes on to agree with Irenaeus that the narrative of Gnosticism, "represents a disfiguration and a refiguration of the biblical narrative. Moreover, this disfiguration-refiguration is a function of a hermeneutical programme that is broadly transgressive in nature. In describing the features of Valentinian Gnosticism, O'Regan (2001:102) argues that it represents the "adaptation of a system of symbol and myth, which if it emerged in the same field as Christianity, is not identical with it".

O'Regan's project is extensive and highly complex. One has to be cautious in

making application of O'Regan's research to feminist theology. There is a demonstrable line of thought that extends from Hegel, through influences such as Marxism and others, to feminism. Much feminist theology certainly follows the same transgressive disfiguration-refiguration of the biblical narrative. Symbols and narratives that belong to the Christian narrative are deconstructed, then reconstructed and appropriated as having an intention that is completely dislocated from the text.

While there are significant differences, such as feminism's rejection of a dualism between matter and spirit in favour of a monist unity of all things, feminist theology has much in common with Gnosticism. Feminism's rejection of male figures and symbols leads to the replacement of Yahweh with Sophia. Yahweh becomes Gnosticism's demiurge, the evil male creator and dispenser of laws. Human beings didn't fall into sin and don't need things like forgiveness from God, they just need the revelation or discovery that they are innately divine so that they can take their place in the divine nature. Redemption takes place through a renewal of consciousness. This redemption is ultimately expressed through the removal of all dualisms and hierarchies and the absorption of everything into a monad, where God is the totality of all being. The characteristics of Gnosticism are evident.

Illustrative of how feminist theology echoes Gnostic thought is Mollenkott's (1993:16) description of herself as "a person who knows she is an innocent spiritual being who is temporarily having human experiences", and (1993:21) spirituality involves "living out of the pure and eternal core of one's being". Both Elaine Pagels (1976) and McFague (1987) seek to recover the feminine imagery lost in the Gnostic gospels that were suppressed by the early church.

Gnostic tendencies within African feminist theology can be seen in examples such as Louise Tappa's (1988:34) claim that, "I am convinced that Jesus died so that the patriarchal God might die, and that Jesus rose so that the true God revealed in Jesus might rise in our lives". In this way, Yahweh becomes the evil demiurge of Gnosticism, and Jesus the redeemer who imparts a new consciousness to humanity.

1.4.4 Evaluation

The debate over gender roles within the Christian community of faith is taking place within an ideological context where clearly more is at stake than just the emancipation of women. Space does not permit a full examination of all the issues that arise from the confluence of humanism, monism and Gnosticism within feminist thought and ideology. What seems clear is that feminist theology has and is being shaped by influences and ideological agendas that are foreign and even antithetical to the Christian faith. This creates a need for our own "hermeneutic of suspicion". What is the agenda here? We must agree that feminism has provided a necessary and often valid critique of a male-dominated society. It has engaged society and the church in a valuable process of re-examining texts, and the structures and roles that society derives from them. However, there are clearly ideological and philosophical streams running within feminism that are fundamentally inimical with theism in general and Christianity in particular.

1.5 Conclusion

The debate, stimulated by the rise of feminism, about gender issues within Christian faith communities represents a collision of hermeneutical models as well as a collision of

ideologies and worldviews. At a fundamental level, post-structuralism and reader response hermeneutics collides with the historical and objectivist hermeneutical approaches. It is not surprising that the end products display profound divergence on most of the issues; the two approaches are diametrically opposed to each other. Furthermore, where the illusion of objectivity has been exposed on the one hand, on the other there is a foundation of nihilism and a consequent loss of all meaning.

Even where the historical and objectivist approaches are nuanced, and take into account the reader's capacity for self deception and the impossibility of determining authorial intent and context fully and comprehensively, they remain anathema to approaches that deny the possibility of universally applicable meaning.

In his article, "Poststructuralist Approaches: New Historicism and Postmodernism", Carroll (1998:51) notes the incongruity of the outcome of this, in that a view that all competing readings are equal would require one to admit that an Apartheid driven reading of the Bible is as valid as a dialogical reading or a psychoanalytic reading or a deconstructive reading. He writes (1998:62), "The future will be a paradise of different readings, with none privileged and all equally valid". He sees this threatened by his perception of an advancing fundamentalism that will attempt to impose its reading over and above others, and suggests that there is a need for values which resist domination and that encourage the practise of liberty and critical reasoning in order to avoid this scenario. While these values have merit, they only represent a preference. There is no real reason why Carroll's preference should be imposed on people who value patriarchal structures, or those who prefer other values as a guiding principle. Herein lies a problem with approaches to interpretation that ignore the author and then completely centre the reading subject. They provide no basis for saying why a reading that favours the

oppressed is more desirable than one which favours patriarchy, all they can do is stake their claim among any number of other readings.

The critique of the alleged objectivity of the reader as a disinterested subject is valid and helpful. Human beings have enormous capacity for self-deception. Fee and Stuart (1982:59-60), conservative scholars, describe this when they show how prior theological commitments cause us to read that commitment back into the text. We all have interpretive grids that cause us to screen out evidence that might contradict the assumptions we bring to the text. There is a palpable circularity here, where we risk making our preconceptions our conclusions. However, methods of interpretation which respond to this by locating meaning entirely in the reader do not address this problem, they merely succumb to it. If one is seeking something more than the workings of one's own imagination as a basis for faith and life, and beyond that as the foundation for authentic hope, this is surely self-defeating.

Thiselton (2006:627) points out that,

“It is of the essence of biblical authority that Scripture challenges, transforms, corrects and reshapes the prior horizons or network of assumptions that humankind brings to the text on the basis of natural reason, individual consciousness and prior experience. The Holy Spirit communicates a life-changing word for ‘Beyond’. The word of Scripture is creative; it is no merely passive ‘mirror’ of private or prior prejudices”.

Thiselton (2006:638) argues further that there needs to be a measure of stability in language, or else James Stuart's concern that “the remembered Christ becomes an imagined Christ” is proved to be true.

If we disregard the view of the Bible that Thiselton expresses here, we would have no option but to accept a white supremacist reading of the Bible and a liberation theology reading as equally valid. The same would apply to feminist and patriarchal readings. Rorty's local pragmatism becomes the only criterion for choosing between various options. Certainly, a reading of the Bible from the perspective of postmodern literary theory renders it absolutely redundant as a source of hope or change.

Charlene Spretnak (1991:260), writing from a feminist perspective, offers a perceptive critique of deconstructive postmodernism, concluding that,

“Obsessive subjectivity has finally folded in on itself until it has devoured the (language based) sense of self and destroyed the logic of subjectivity altogether. ...The contemporary forms of subjective idealism that assure the individual that nothing outside one's constructing mind has any claim on him or her are initially experienced as liberating for anyone who has experienced domination. ... The aggressive surge of denial called for by deconstructionism, however, leads to a flattened valuelessness in which nothing is left but the will to power. The preferences of an individual or the group can then carry the day only through political manipulations and displays of power, control, and forceful domination.”

Thiselton (2006:565 italics his) adds to this picture, “If each competing group, class, ethnic tradition, gender, guild or party produces its own *internal* criteria of supposed rationality in order to serve its own power interests, rational debate collapses, *not only into mere rhetoric*, but soon also into *accusation, blame, corporate self-righteousness and conflict*”.

Within such an approach to meaning, where preferences for certain readings of the Bible

are driven by panentheistic monism and neo-Gnostic distortions of the text, the debate between Christianity and feminism becomes an irreconcilable clash of worldviews where it is not surprising that agreement is very difficult to find.

Even within Evangelical Christianity there is heated debate about the interpretation of passages in the Bible that deal with gender. William J. Webb's *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (2001) addresses the debate in the context, and we will examine Webb's contribution to the debate in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 2

WILLIAM J WEBB'S REDEMPTIVE-MOVEMENT HERMENEUTIC AND THE GENDER DEBATE WITHIN EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY

2.1 Introduction

In order to understand the debate over what the Bible teaches about gender roles in the Christian community of faith it is necessary to briefly discuss the typical evangelical approach to interpreting Scripture. Following this, the contribution of William J. Webb will be described in some detail and then evaluated. Webb's hermeneutical model has elicited highly positive and highly negative reactions, with the most negative reactions coming from those scholars within evangelical Christianity that hold to some form of patriarchy based on a very literal interpretation of the various texts that describe gender roles. A significant weakness of Webb's model, the manner in which he defines the end point of his trajectory will be critiqued, and the remaining chapters of this paper will propose an alternative end point derived from biblical theology.

2.2 Evangelical Christian Hermeneutics

Bernard Ramm (1970) describes a typical evangelical approach to interpreting the Bible. Foundational to evangelical hermeneutics is the belief that the Bible, in its canonical form, was inspired by God. It is therefore a spiritual book through which God

communicates and reveals himself, and it needs to be approached with faith and a readiness to obey its teaching.

From this foundation, evangelical interpreters argue for a number of principles by which Scripture is to be interpreted:

1. *The clarity of scripture.* While there are passages that are challenging and complex, the meaning of the literature within the Bible can be understood through a proper grasp of the historical background of the text and a careful examination of the language of the text itself. The work of the indwelling Holy Spirit assists interpreters to understand the meaning of the text.
2. *Revelation is accommodated.* The Bible was written within a human social context, and therefore concepts and analogies are drawn from that context. The anthropomorphic nature of much language about God is an expression of this.
3. *Revelation is progressive.* This describes a general pattern in which God's revelation of himself moves from immaturity in the Old Testament to maturity in the New Testament.
4. *Scripture interprets scripture.* Difficult, obscure passages are to be understood in the light of passages whose meaning is clear.
5. *The unity of Scripture.* While there are multiple theologies within both the Old and New Testaments, there is a unity within Scripture, focussed on the cross, which makes systematic theology possible.

Based on these convictions, the evangelical interpreter applies what is known as the historical-grammatical method. This has exegesis, or determining the original meaning and intention of the text, as its goal. In order to do this, the text must be interpreted in its

original language. Working from extant texts, textual criticism is used to determine the most accurate and reliable texts. Then, within these texts, the natural and most apparent sense of what the words mean is taken to be the meaning of the text. Any further or secondary meanings are dependant on the literal meaning. Historical-grammatical exegesis is therefore concerned with the meaning of the words of the original language in the historical context in which the passage was written. The meaning of the words, the syntax, and the surrounding context of a particular grammatical construction, gives rise to meaning.

Meaning is governed by considering context at a number of levels. The context of any verse is the whole Bible, the Testament it is in, the book it is in and the passages immediately before and after it. Based on this understanding of context, passages using similar words or dealing with similar concepts are compared and what they communicate is synthesized. Issues of literary genre are also taken into account. Historical grammatical exegesis therefore depends on knowledge of the original language and an understanding of the society and culture in which the text was written as well as biblical history and geography.

Of great importance is the reality the interpretation of the Bible gives rise to doctrine, which is normative for belief and practice. The movement from interpretation to doctrine often involves the extrapolation of principle from the text, the translation of practices from one culture into another and the deduction of the spirit of certain statements and commands. A distinction is also drawn between what the Bible records and what it approves. There is progress from exegesis to praxis through a process of application, in which the meaning of the text is applied to the contemporary context.

There is a movement in evangelical hermeneutics from exegesis to theology to praxis. In the formulation of theology there is usually an attempt to develop a system that reflects the complete message of the Bible. The teaching of the Bible, obtained in this manner is regarded as the supreme authority for the church and for the individual Christian's faith and life.

2.3 The Gender Debate within Evangelical Christianity

As argued in the previous chapter, the debate over gender roles within the Evangelical Christian community of faith takes place within a theological context where clearly more is at stake than just the authority of scripture, as some of the protagonists, such as Grudem (1991; 2004) and Wellum (2004) claim is the issue. That Evangelicals are committed to the authority of the biblical text can be taken as a given. How that authority functions, especially in terms of the cultural components of biblical texts and the application of these in new and different cultures, is at the heart of the debate over gender roles.

The reality is that biblical texts were written within societies that were profoundly patriarchal and the texts reflect this reality. These texts have been used to legitimise and perpetuate a system of male power and exploitation of women, in much the same way as similarly culturally embedded texts were used to justify slavery. It has become clear that biblical texts on slavery needed to be liberated from their cultural baggage in order for the intention of the gospel to be realized. How does one approach the texts on women?

Within evangelical Christianity there is a spectrum of positions in response to this

question, however most of these positions are clustered around opposite ends of the continuum.

2.3.1 The Complementarian Position

On the one side are those who would probably call themselves “complementarians”, although their critics would call them patriarchal. Prominent advocates of a complementarian view are John Piper and Wayne Grudem, the editors of *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (1991), something of a definitive text for this position. They are also the driving force in the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. Complementarians argue for equality of dignity between men and women but difference in social function. However this inevitably leads to what George Orwell (1996:133) contemplated in *Animal Farm*, where, “All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others”.

Piper and Grudem’s book (1991) provides a comprehensive explanation of their position, based on what they understand to be the clear teaching of the Bible. Typically, complementarian views would argue for male leadership in the home and the church, and prohibit women from exercising what they see as primary teaching roles in the church. Piper (1991:35-36) captures this in his definitions of manhood and womanhood, “At the heart of mature masculinity is a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for and protect women in ways appropriate to a man’s differing relationships”, and, “At the heart of mature femininity is a freeing disposition to affirm, receive and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men in ways appropriate to a woman’s differing relationships”. Piper (1991:32) prefaces these definitions by pointing out that he is describing manhood and womanhood “according to the Bible”. These definitions are used to develop a series of

challenges to both men and women. What is significant, and fairly typical of complementarian models, is that where men are challenged to limit their aspirations for advancement in their careers in order to be of service to Christ, women are challenged to abandon careers in favour of being full time homemakers (Piper & Grudem 1991:56).

2.3.2 The Egalitarian Position

On the other side there are those who would identify themselves as “egalitarian” in their approach, but whose critics would label feminists (particularly with a view that “Christian feminist” is an oxymoron). Proponents of an egalitarian position include Craig Keener (2004), Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (2004), Kevin Giles (2002) and William Webb (2001). An egalitarian position would argue for relationships of mutual submission with total equality of power between men and women, and either no absolute role distinctions, or minimal distinctions based on biological differences. This is expressed as partnership in the home, and function based on character qualifications and gifts in the church.

2.3.3 Evaluation of these Positions

It is beyond the scope of this paper to offer a detailed description and critique of these positions. However, highlighting some of the common weaknesses they both have will be helpful in illuminating a possible way forward.

Within the debate in evangelical circles, positions seem to be entrenched, with opponents being labelled with pejorative names that they would not choose to represent their position. Grudem complains that what he calls a hierarchical position is labelled as “patriarchal” in a way that misrepresents his position and

links it with an ideology. At the same time Grudem (2006) labels those who would call themselves egalitarian as “evangelical feminists”, ascribing an ideological foundation to their position that is not necessarily fair or accurate.

In both camps arguments can be somewhat circular, where the presuppositions of a particular group effectively become its conclusions. Each camp tends to approach the text with the intention of using it to support their position, and both camps run the risk of eisegesis in the interpretation and application they make of difficult texts.

Egalitarian writers seem to struggle with the creation narrative and its implications. For example, Giles (2002:204) admits that a hint of subordination may be found in Genesis 2, but then relegates this to less theological significance. It seems that Giles struggles to deal with the data of the text because it is in conflict with his theology.

Morphew (2009:136-137) notes, with regard to the creation narratives, that while egalitarian conservative evangelicals develop creative and sophisticated reasons for removing patriarchy from the texts, feminist and liberal readings seem to be able to see the obvious elements of patriarchy.

An example of this is Stratton (1995:95), who argues that the levels of patriarchy in the narrative cannot be explained away, only exposed. She writes (1995:101),

“We have seen that feminist efforts to the contrary have not been able to eliminate the patriarchy evident in the man/woman relationship throughout the story. The woman is created as the man’s helper. She is created precisely for

him and is derived from him. The man exercises his authority over her not only after the fruit-eating incident, but also before by naming her in 2:23”.

Complementarians may, as Giles (2002:111) suggests, be guilty of reading their social conservatism on gender roles back into Trinitarian texts in the Bible, arriving at a subordinationist position with regard to the relationship between the Son and the Father which is both recent and novel.

Stackhouse (2005:29-30) raises the methodological issue of control texts in the debate. These are texts that influence or even determine our interpretation of other texts. Jesus’ summary of the law in the two great commandments to love God with all one has and to love one’s neighbour as oneself (Matt. 22:40) is an example of a text which functions this way. Egalitarians tend to use Galatians 3:28 as a control text, while complementarians use texts such as 1 Timothy 2:11-12 or 1 Corinthians 14:33-35. Stackhouse raises the role of the hermeneutical circle or spiral in moving backwards and forwards between the texts we assume are control texts and those we assume are secondary.

The interpretation and therefore the application of difficult texts become a matter of which information one selects as relevant for one’s historical reconstruction, or whether one undertakes such a reconstruction at all or simply takes what a text says at face value. It is therefore not surprising that scholars seem to keep on finding that the text supports their position!

It seems that to the extent that difficult texts (e.g. the creation narratives in Gen. 1-3; 1 Cor. 11:3-13; 1Tim. 2:11-15) are interpreted in isolation they are vulnerable to

a variety of interpretations being imposed on them, with no clear principle for deciding which interpretation reflects the intended meaning of the text. Careful historical reconstruction will be helpful, but even exegesis based on historical reconstruction will be vulnerable to subjective selectivity in terms of how the reconstruction is done and what aspects of the social fabric in which the text was written are brought to the process, or even considered important enough to record in commentaries. Stackhouse (2005:23) describes this problem with regard to trying to understand 1 Timothy 2:11-15, “I had been reading more than a dozen attempts to explain this passage. Some were ingenious; a few were even likely. But it struck me with paradigm shaking force that no one could explain all the clauses in this passage with full plausibility”.

While complementarians base their position on a desire to be true to what the Bible teaches, even in those passages of Scripture that they deem to be important, there seems to be a surprising degree of selectivity about which passages one needs to obey literally to be true to the Bible. For example, 1 Timothy 2:11-15 tends to function as the principal control text for complementarians. Further, a hierarchical structure for men in leadership is developed from 1 Timothy 3. However, it is difficult to find any author, complementarian or otherwise, who defends the proscriptions given to widows in 1 Timothy 5, or any contemporary church movement that prescribes these. The selectivity apparent in this should at the very least function as a warning of inconsistent theological method.

Morphew (2009:128-135) agrees with egalitarians and points out the difficulties in taking the household codes of the Greco Roman world and applying them in an unqualified way today. Those who hold to a complementary position fail to deal

with the implications of the texts on slavery and how these have subsequently been actualised. However, he also points out that egalitarians evade the reality of patriarchy and its implications (before the fall in Genesis 2) as a part of God's created order.

There seems to be a danger of doing theology by proof text rather than interpreting texts in the context of the whole of the Bible and other texts that deal with similar issues. Jaroslav Pelikan (1971:175-210), an historian of doctrine, shows that while New Testament texts about the incarnation could be read in a way that supports various heresies, such as adoptionism, Arianism, modalism and Nestorianism, "the church has concluded that the *best* reading of *most* of the texts, including the *most important texts*, leads to the conclusions of the Chalcedonian definition of 451". This recognized the unity of the humanity and Divinity of Christ as a hypostatic union. If one applies Pelikan's logic to the Biblical texts on gender roles in the church, the danger of selective proof-texting is avoidable.

Stackhouse's summary (2005:23-29) of the difficulties inherent in evaluating both positions is helpful. He (2005:27) points out that proponents of various positions have often attacked one another's views on grounds that are not theological, reminding us that Christians don't make decisions on the basis of Bible study alone, but also consult tradition, reason and experience, accessing all of these within the context of community in the church and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He (2005:28) writes, "It is deficient theology, therefore, that halts all deliberation with mere proof-texting ('The Bible says it; I believe it; that settles it'); or with appeals to current social practice ('Women lead businesses, universities and governments – it is just ridiculous not to have them lead churches')".

2.4 William J. Webb's Contribution

A recent contribution to the debate has been *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals, Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (2001) by William J. Webb. The remainder of this chapter will examine William J. Webb's proposed system of what he calls "redemptive-movement hermeneutics". This is a hermeneutical system by which Webb attempts to determine which elements of the Bible are trans-cultural in their application, and which are bound up within cultural practices and norms of the time they were written.

William J. Webb is professor of New Testament at Heritage Seminary, Cambridge, Ontario. An ordained Baptist minister, he has a Ph.D. from Dallas Theological Seminary. Apart from the book under discussion he has also written *Returning Home: New Covenant and Second Exodus as the Context for 2 Corinthians 6.14-7.1* Sheffield : JSOT Press, 1993, and numerous journal articles, including: "A Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic: Encouraging Dialogue Among Four Evangelical Views." *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 48:2 (2005) and "Balancing Paul's Original-Creation and Pro-Creation Arguments: 1 Corinthians 11:11-12 in Light of Modern Embryology." *Westminster Theological Journal* 66 (2004). He also contributed two chapters to *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, edited by Ronald Pierce, Rebecca Merrill Groothuis and Gordon D. Fee (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

2.4.1 A Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic

In *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals* Webb puts forward what he calls a "redemptive-movement" hermeneutic. This seeks to eliminate cultural components of the biblical text that may be ethically regressive within our culture by discovering

the redemptive movement they represented within their own culture and then using this “redemptive spirit” of the text in making application to our own culture.

Webb (2001:13) notes that one of the challenges of biblical scholarship has always been the influence of culture on both the writing and interpretation of Scripture. While this is not a new concern in evangelical biblical scholarship, Webb’s approach moves beyond traditional historical grammatical hermeneutics in attempting to determine if there is an application of the text that transcends the ethic that it applies to its contemporary culture. By discerning the redemptive spirit within the text and canon of scripture, Webb suggests that we are able to make application in a way that actualizes the text today, rather than in a way that may actually be ethically regressive when compared with our modern culture. One could literally fulfil the meaning of what Webb (2001:34) calls the “isolated words” of the text without fulfilling the radically redemptive that lies within the text when compared with the values and norms of the world it was written in. Webb clarifies that by “isolated” he means, “... a reading of Scripture in cultural and canonical isolation”.

Webb (2001:30-31) explains his thesis,

“A crucial distinction drives ... the entire hermeneutic proposed within this book – the distinction between (1) a *redemptive-spirit* appropriation of scripture, which encourages movement beyond the original application of the text in the ancient world, and (2) a *static* appropriation of scripture, which understands the words of the text aside from or with minimal emphasis upon their underlying spirit and thus restricts any modern application of scripture to where the isolated words of the text fell in their original setting”.

Webb (2001:31-32) uses the symbols, X-Y-Z to describe his model. X represents the original culture, Y the ethic that God taught in the time of that culture, and Z represents the ethic that God would have us ultimately accept and aspire towards. Webb (2001:247) explains this approach, applying it particularly to the Bible's approach to slavery. He argues that Scripture does not represent a "finalized ethic" in every area of human relationships. Rather, the text initiates movement towards the redemption and restoration of the society to which it was given. Given the way biblical texts are addressed to a particular historical context and culture, to stop where the Bible stops may fail to apply the redemptive spirit of the text in the same way that it spoke to the original audience.

Webb (2001:56) argues that a redemptive-movement hermeneutic takes the authority of scripture more seriously than a static approach because it is able to deal with difficult texts that record incidents where God seems to bless horrific acts and give legislation that is far from perfect. He suggests that whereas a redemptive-movement hermeneutic is able to contextualize these texts within their culture, and by noting how they attempted to reform and redeem that culture discover their redemptive spirit, what he terms a static hermeneutic attempts to "brush these texts under the carpet" without really dealing with what they seem to communicate about God. He notes that these texts form significant barriers to faith for many people.

2.4.2 Eighteen Criteria

In differentiating between those elements of Scripture that are culturally bound and those that are trans-cultural in their application, Webb offers eighteen criteria. These are used, separately and in combination, for determining what kind of

ongoing relevance a passage has, or if its literal application was only to its original audience. He divides these criteria into four categories: persuasive, moderately persuasive, inconclusive and extra-biblical.

Webb (2001:69) offers five intra-Scriptural criteria that he views as persuasive. They are what he terms, “Preliminary Movement”, “Seed Ideas”, “Breakouts”, “Purpose/Intent Statements” and “Basis in Fall and/or Curse”. He then offers eight intra-Scriptural criteria that he considers moderately persuasive. These are: “Original Creation, 1: Patterns”, “Original Creation, 2: Primogeniture”, “New Creation”, “Competing Options”, “Opposition to Original Culture”, “Closely Related Issues”, “Penal Code” and “Specific versus General”. He suggests the inconclusive criteria of “Basis in Theological Analogy”, “Contextual Comparisons” and “Appeal to Old Testament”, and finally he offers the extra-Scriptural criteria of “Pragmatics Between Two Cultures” and “Scientific Evidence”.

Webb applies these criteria to the issues of slavery, women and homosexuality and attempts to discern any redemptive movement within the canon of Scripture. He (2001:247ff) describes clear redemptive movement in the treatment of slaves and women, but a lack of movement in the bible’s attitude to homosexuality. The criteria proposed by Webb for determining redemptive movement within the text of Scripture require further explanation in order for his system to be evaluated.

i Preliminary Movement

With regard to Preliminary Movement, Webb (2001:73) argues that, “A component of a text may be culturally bound if Scripture modifies the original culture in such a way that suggests further movement is possible and even

advantageous in a subsequent culture”. For Webb the question is whether Scripture has modified the cultural norms of the original culture in a preliminary way (by bringing the greatest level of change possible within that culture at that time) or in an absolute way (by pushing society as far as it ever needs to go). He assesses this by comparing the biblical text with prevailing ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman cultures. With regard to women, Webb notes improved rights for female slaves and concubines (Ex. 21:7-11), no bodily punishment of wives, women having limited inheritance rights (Num. 27:1-11; 36:1-13), the right of women to initiate divorce and greater rights in divorce cases (Deut. 20:10-14; 22:15-19; 24:1-4), fairer treatment of women suspected of adultery (Num 5), and what he perceives as an elevation of female sexuality (Lev. 19:29; 21:9; Deut. 23:17-18 cf. 1 Cor. 6:10,15). In the New Testament Webb (2001:76-81) points to a softening of the husband’s side of the household codes. Webb’s (2001:83) point is that the Bible reflects a consistent higher view of women and wives than the cultures to which the text was initially addressed. He summarizes the usefulness of this criterion by noting that while it doesn’t answer the question of whether movement is preliminary or absolute, it does show the direction of the movement.

ii Seed Ideas

Webb (2001:83) explains the criterion of “seed ideas” by submitting that a component of a text may be cultural if “seed ideas” that suggest and encourage further movement are present in the rest of Scripture. In applying this criterion, Webb (2001:84-87) examines Galatians 3:28 and other “in Christ” statements in 1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 2:15 and Colossians 3:11. In these texts Paul summarizes areas of social inequality and

pronounces a new, equal status in Christ. Webb suggests that Paul fleshed out the Jew-Gentile implications of Galatians 3:28 because this was critical for the spread of the gospel. However, for Paul to fully express the implications of the slave and female categories might have been detrimental to the spread of the gospel in that culture. Once the church caught sight of the social implications of Jew-Gentile equality it began to see the need for taking the equality in Christ of slaves and actualising it in society; as time brought greater social readiness the implications of Galatians 3:28 could be worked out for slaves and for women. In summary, Webb (2001:91) writes that these seed texts shaped a theoretical equality, which was subsequently taken further in the emancipation of slaves and that is highly relevant to women's issues.

iii Breakouts

Webb explains "Breakouts" as instances where there is a variance within Scripture by which later texts break away from, or overturn, social norms reflected in a particular text. There is a difference between this kind of pronounced deviation and the subtler, unrealized seed idea. Webb writes (2001:91), "... the breakout is real or actualized relative to its original audience. It challenges the standard sociological patterns in the present reality". He (2001:95-99) explains that it is important that the direction of the breakout is the same as that of any preliminary movement relative to the prevailing culture. Webb gives a number of examples of such breakouts from the Old Testament, which are contrary to prevailing patriarchal forms and reverse the status and role expectations of women. He begins with Deborah (Judges 4-5) as a reversal of cultural leadership norms. She functions as a judge in the community, communicates God's will to the people and leads the

army against Sisera. Webb then refers to Huldah, a woman consulted by the king and other male leaders (2 Kings 22:14-20), as well as the inheritance Job's daughters received along with their brothers (Job 42:15).

Webb (2001:99-102) then points to three significant breakouts in the New Testament, Priscilla (Acts 18:1-4, 18-19; 1 Cor. 16:9), Junia (Rom. 16:7), and Paul's instructions concerning the practice of sex within marriage (1 Cor. 7:3-5). Priscilla is significant because of the way her name is placed first and her husband's second; she seems to be a primary leader in evangelism, church planting, and the instruction of Apollos, an educated man. Linguistic evidence suggests that Junia is female, and is "outstanding among the apostles" along with Andronicus. This breakout is significant because it is in an area otherwise dominated by men.

Webb (2001:101) suggests that Paul's instructions to husbands and wives in 1 Corinthians 7:3-5 is a significant breakout because of the way Paul gives equal power to both partners in the realm of making decisions about their practice of sex. This eliminates any power differential and sets up mutual deference and mutual consent as the basis for decision making. It amounts to equally shared leadership between the husband and the wife in this area, and it renders the idea of autonomous male leadership in the home redundant because, based on what Paul teaches here, a man would have to get his wife's agreement in any case. Webb (2001:101) writes that this is, "...an intriguing breakout in view of the profound dominance of males over females in every area of life and especially in the sexual domain". Since Paul establishes an egalitarian model of relating in one area of marriage, this calls

hierarchical models of marriage into question as a culturally bound phenomenon.

Webb (2001:104) adds that, far from being mere exceptions to the rule, these breakouts converge with seed ideas and preliminary movement elsewhere such that there is discernable movement within Scripture. When compared with the slavery breakouts Webb cites (upon which Christian calls for the abolition of slavery were substantially based), Webb argues that these breakouts argue strongly for egalitarian conclusions.

iv Purpose/Intent Statements

In application of his criterion of “Purpose/Intent Statements”, Webb (2001:108) examines 1 Peter 3:6, where wives are instructed to model their obedience on Sarah, who addressed her husband as “master”, and Titus 2:5 where wives are instructed to submit to their husbands. He notes that in both cases these instructions are linked to purpose statements about evangelism and mission. He suggests that today this kind of submission and subservience would in fact fail to fulfil its original missional intention. A husband today, who sees his wife as an equal partner, would find this kind of patriarchal submission repulsive and it would therefore be a hindrance in his coming to faith in Christ. Webb (2001:108) makes the point, “By *actually* doing the text (the literal imperative), we may no longer be doing the *intent* of the text (the purpose statement)”.

v Basis in Fall or Curse

Webb’s (2001:111) fifth persuasive intra-scriptural criterion is “Basis in Fall or Curse”. By this he means that a component of a text may be cultural if it has

its basis in the Fall of humanity or the curse that followed. Genesis 3:16 describes the rule of husbands over wives as a result of the curse. This suggests that women occupying subordinate roles are simply a continuation of the curse. Webb (2001:115) argues that the hierarchy of man over woman began with the curse, and that, "...finding explicit statements of hierarchy in the Genesis text before the fall is an elusive task". Integral to be a Christian is to live in opposition to the curse rather than to perpetuate it. Webb (2001:121) summarizes this criterion by pointing out that while in one sense the curse is trans-cultural (because it describes the way things are), there is another sense in which it is not trans-cultural (because it does not describe what we should do).

vi *Basis in Original Creation, Section 1: Patterns*

Webb (2001:123) follows this with an explanation of his eight moderately persuasive intra-scriptural criteria. The first of these is what he calls "Basis in Original Creation, Section 1: Patterns". He examines these on the basis that since creation was good there may be enduring patterns in creation. After looking at neutral examples (vegetarianism, the procreation command, farming as an occupation, the length of a working week, and later on, polygamy) to determine the ongoing applicability of creation patterns for contemporary culture he discusses examples related to gender. Webb (2001:127) begins with male and female as jointly reflecting the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26), and the mandate to rule over creation together (Gen. 1:26) as indicative of an egalitarian spirit. He (2001:127-131) then gives six examples that are more reflective of patriarchy: the woman's role as a helper (Gen. 2:18-20), the woman's creation from Adam's rib (Gen. 2:22), the

man's naming of the woman (Gen. 2:23), the man role in initiating the marriage union (Gen 2:24), God addressing the man first (Gen. 3:9), and the order of creation (Gen. 2:7, 22) . Webb notes that while two elements affirm equality, the other six portray a patriarchal picture. He (2001:131) argues that because the neutral examples are culturally bound, and do not reflect God's absolute will for humanity, questions can be raised about the trans-cultural claims of patriarchal patterns found in creation. While everything within the garden was good, this does not make all the features of the garden trans-cultural patterns for today.

vii *Basis in Original Creation, Section 2: Primogeniture*

In his seventh criterion, Webb deals with the issue of primogeniture in the creation account. He (2001:134) notes that the Apostle Paul seems to place great weight on the order of creation as he applies it to the issue of teaching in the church. Piper and Grudem (1991:81) argue that there is an assumption throughout the book of Genesis that the firstborn in a human family has the special responsibility of leadership in the family. This idea of prominence in a social order based on order of birth or creation was common in the ancient world, and is behind Paul's argument in 1 Timothy 2:13.

In assessing whether a gender hierarchy based on primogeniture is trans-culturally applicable, Webb (2001:136-8) notes that Scripture frequently overturns primogeniture values. He points to a number of examples from Genesis, including God's cursing of the firstborn, Cain (Gen. 4:1-16); Shem carrying a higher status than his older brother, Japhet (Gen. 10:1,21; 11:10); God's word to Rebecca that of the two nations in her womb the older will

serve the younger (Gen. 25:23); and Judah being given rule and Joseph a double inheritance instead of Reuben, the eldest (Gen. 49:8, 22-26). He lists another 13 examples from the rest of the Old Testament.

Webb (2001:139-140) argues that primogeniture is tied to the ancient world, where it accomplished a number of concerns related to agriculture, land transference, lineage survival and provision for large extended families. It had great merit in this cultural setting, but becomes counter productive and redundant in a different culture where there are fewer children and land is not tied to survival. Webb (2001:143) points out that Christians no longer practice primogeniture today, but acknowledges that this may be the weakest of his arguments against it, as Christians may not be doing what they are supposed to be doing. In assessing this criterion he (2001:145) concludes, "While the honour allotment within primogeniture may be culturally shaped, one could still apply the text's underlying principle of 'granting honour to whom honour is due'". With a text like 1 Timothy 2:13, after discovering the cultural component within the text, the underlying principle of choosing teachers or leaders who are worthy can be applied to both genders.

viii Basis in New Creation

In his eighth criterion, Webb (2001:145) moves from creation to the new creation material in the Bible, arguing that a component of a text may be transcultural if it is rooted in new creation material. He refers to texts within Paul's writings that speak of a new humanity, such as 1 Corinthians 12:13, Galatians 3:28, Ephesians 2:15 and 4:22-24, and Colossians 3:9-11. He goes on to argue that a passage like Galatians 3:28 needs to be read, not just in the

context of Galatians, but also in the broader context of other Pauline texts that develop his concept of a new humanity. For Webb (2001:147) these texts need to be read with sociological as well as soteriological implications. Webb (2001:148) writes that the new creation patterns have far greater value for reflecting transcultural features than the original creation patterns, and the counter-cultural dimension that these texts have within their original context calls attention to their transcultural character. Redemption develops and even improves on creation, which was good but not perfect.

In his evaluation of the criterion, Webb writes that Paul is not denying differences in race, gender or socio-economic position. These texts point to the renewal of human relationships rather than the changing of humanity into some new, unknown kind of being. Rather than reflecting cultural practices and norms, the relationships between humans change and are redefined and modelled on Christ's love. He (2001:149) writes, "Essential aspects of the original creation such as race and gender are not obliterated in the new creation humanity. They remain and are transfigured, sanctified and celebrated. The new humanity must use the differences to bless and raise up instead of destroy and disadvantage".

Webb (2001:150-2) concludes that the obvious conclusion from these texts is that race and economic status were not to be the basis for leadership or status in the Christian community. The New Creation texts have clear sociological implications. This should provide a clear vision for the role of women in the new creation humanity.

ix Competing Options

In his ninth criterion, Webb (2001:152-3) deals with what he calls “Competing Options”. By this he means that where a writer agrees with a cultural situation where there was only one option, this increases the likelihood that the writer’s choice is culturally relative. Conversely where the writer presents one of many competing options, it is more likely that the option he presents is transcultural. He (2001:153-154) mentions examples of this such as slavery (as opposed to emancipation), monarchy (as opposed to democracy) and a geocentric cosmology (as opposed to a heliocentric one) to show the existence of monolithic cultural norms that are reflected in the text of the Bible, which are unlikely to be put forward as transcultural norms for Christians. They simply reflect what the norm was in the prevailing cultural context. He argues that patriarchy had a similar status within the cultures in which the Bible was written and that there were no competing options.

Webb (2001:157) claims that this criterion is important for discerning whether components of a text are transcultural, as when Scripture chooses one of a number of competing options it can be taken to be giving clear communication in addressing that issue. Where competing options are absent, it is difficult to conclude that the biblical writer is actually making a case for something rather than simply reflecting a cultural norm. Webb concludes that this criterion increases the probability of patriarchy being a cultural component of the text.

x Opposition to Original Culture

Webb’s (2001:158) tenth criterion is “Opposition to Original Culture”. This proposes that a component of a text may be transcultural if it stands in

opposition or moves in a different direction to the original culture. He (2001:160) notes that the passages that restrict the activities of women reflect the norms of their time, but that there are a number of counter-cultural aspects in some of the texts on women. Among these are the household codes (and the way Paul softens patriarchy in these) and Galatians 3:28, which Webb suggests are in quite strong opposition to their original culture. Webb (2001:162) concedes that this criterion has quite limited scope in terms of its application and suggests that while it provides valuable insight it is not conclusive.

xi Closely Related Issues

Criterion eleven deals with what Webb (2001:162) terms “Closely Related Issues”. By this he means that a component of a text may be culturally bound if issues closely related to that text or issue are culturally bound. Webb (2001:165-7) offers a number of examples to illustrate the application of the criterion to the issue of women: the attitude of ownership or women as property (seen in texts like Gen. 20:3; Ex. 20:17; Deut. 22:22); the father to husband transfer (Deut. 22: 19, 28-29); inheritance (Deut. 21:16-17); virginity expectations (Deut. 22:13-19); adultery and extramarital sex legislation (Num. 5:11-31); divorce legislation (Deut. 21:10-14); features related to patriarchy such as polygamy (Gen. 25:1-4), the keeping of concubines (Gen. 16:1-4; 2 Sam. 5:13; 1 Kings 11:1-4) and levirate marriage (Deut. 25:5-10); the unequal value of men and women in vow redemption (Lev. 27:1-8); the treatment of women as trophies of war or spoils of battle (Josh. 15:16; 2 Sam. 3:14; Num. 31:25-32)); the restriction of the sign of the covenant to males (Gen. 17:14;

Jer. 34:18-19); and the idea that women are poor leaders (Is. 3:12) or more easily deceived than men (1 Tim. 2:14).

Notwithstanding these examples, Webb (2001:167-171) argues that to suggest that the Bible is sexist is anachronistic, and that in fact the Bible was redemptive in its treatment of women in contrast with prevailing cultures. This redemptive spirit within the text needs to be carried forward in our current setting. The cultural relativity of these closely related issues strengthens the case for patriarchy being a cultural component of the text and calls for an egalitarian framework today, or at the very least a kind of “ultra soft” patriarchy.

xii Penal Code

Webb’s twelfth criterion, “Penal Code” deals with the severity of the penalty for particular actions. He (2001:172) suggests that where a penalty is light or not even mentioned, the prohibited action may be culturally bound, and the more severe the penalty, the more likely the prohibition reflects transcultural values. He acknowledges that this criterion is not without its difficulties and that it presents enormous interpretive challenges, particularly with the severity of the penalty for Sabbath and certain cultic violations. Despite these, Webb (2001:178-9) suggests that it offers insight into the amount of displeasure related to a certain situation, and that there seems to be a broad correlation between the severity of the penalty and the cultural nature of the prohibition.

xiii Specific Instructions versus General Principles

Criterion thirteen deals with “Specific Instructions versus General Principles”.

Here Webb (2001:179) proposes that, “A component of a text may be culturally relative if its specific instructions appear to be at odds with the general principles of Scripture”. He (2001:181) suggests that principles derived from the attributes of God, like holiness justice and love are particularly significant. This raises questions of whether a power inequality between men and women violates a theology of justice, or whether there is inequity in the treatment of women in the Bible. Webb (2001:183) notes that this criterion is difficult to apply because the most loving or just act might not always be obvious, and proposes that this criterion be used in a supplemental manner.

xiv Basis in Theological Analogy

Webb (2001:185-206) then offers four inconclusive criteria. His (2001:185) fourteenth criterion, “Basis in Theological Analogy” proposes that an element of a text may be transcultural if it is related through theological analogy with the character of God or of Christ, i.e. where the author reinforces some idea with a theological or Christological parallel. He (2001:189-90) discusses the analogy of Christ as a husband or “head” (Eph. 5; 1 Cor. 11) and of God as a husband (Hos. 1-2). He argues that one cannot use the analogy of Ephesians 5 to prove that the material is transcultural without doing the same with Hosea 2. Webb (2001:191) argues that although all language about God involves a degree of analogy, with things such as God loving or forgiving, there is a high level of correlation and even direct correspondence between the human and the Divine. However, with analogies such as God being a literal king, or a master, or right-handed, the analogy functions more like a simile. Webb suggests that the theological analogies in texts that deal with women function

in this latter manner and should not be used to argue for the transcultural status of patriarchy.

xv Contextual Comparisons

With criterion fifteen, “Contextual Comparisons”, Webb (2001:192) proposes that a text may be transcultural if the other items in a list or grouping in that context are transcultural. In the same way, the text may be culturally bound to the degree that other elements of its immediate context are culturally bound. He (2001:195) examines a significant number of texts that contain vice and virtue lists in the Old and New Testaments (including Prov. 6:16-19; Jer. 7:9; Ezek. 18:5-9; Hos. 4:2; Mark 7:21; Rom. 1:24-32; 1 Cor. 5:9-11; Gal. 5:19-20; 22-23 and Col. 3:5-9) to demonstrate that where one element is transcultural, nearly all the rest are too. In contrast, with the New Testament household codes (Eph. 5:21-6:9; Col. 3:18-4:1; 1 Tim. 2:8-6:2; Tit. 2:1-10; 1 Pet. 2:11-3:7), there is a split, with slavery and monarchy being cultural, and submission to parents and elders within the church being transcultural. Webb (2001:196) suggests that this should at least invite questions over the husband-wife relationship described in these texts. Webb (2001:200) concedes that a major weakness of the criterion is that no list is wholly free of culturally bound elements, even the vice and sexual taboo lists, and the mixed nature of the outcomes prevents any absolute conclusions from being made.

xvi Appeal to Old Testament

In his sixteenth criterion, “Appeal to Old Testament”, Webb (2001:201) proposes that while continuity between the Old and New Testaments on an issue does not necessarily confer transcultural status, discontinuity is

reasonably conclusive in demonstrating the culturally bound nature of a text. Webb (2001:201-204) shows that the results are inconclusive, because while there is discontinuity on some Old Testament practices like circumcision, the sacrificial system, and food laws, the New Testament does affirm other, clearly culturally bound Old Testament instructions regarding things like monarchy, foot washing customs, greeting with a kiss and lifting up hands in prayer. This makes the New Testament's appeal to and endorsement of Old Testament patriarchy difficult to evaluate using this criterion, although Webb (2001:206) concludes that continuity between Testaments is not a dependable gauge for establishing the transcultural nature of a text.

xvii Pragmatic Basis Between Two Cultures

Webb (2001:209) then moves to extra-scriptural criteria. Criterion seventeen, which Webb considers persuasive, is "Pragmatic Basis Between Two Cultures". By this Webb (2001:209) means that, "A component of a biblical imperative may be culturally relative if the pragmatic basis for the instruction cannot be sustained from one culture to another". Webb contends that pragmatic factors play some role in shaping the biblical text, and that culture-based pragmatics provide insight into what part of a text is a cultural form or a situational expression of the broader transcultural principle within the text. Webb distinguishes between the pragmatic basis which gives the text effect in its original culture and the ultimate basis which is grounded in the character of God, the will of God, and his covenants. He uses the command in Leviticus 19:10 to leave the edges of a field not harvested as an example. The ultimate basis is that one should love one's neighbour because this reflects God's will and character. This is given effect through a cultural practice which is linked to

the high percentage of the population involved in farming and the close proximity between populations and farms. Webb (2001:210-12) suggests a ladder of abstraction that moves from the concrete cultural forms to the abstract transcultural principles. Other examples where this is necessary are Jesus' command to his disciples to wash one another's feet (John 13:14) and people's submission to the king or emperor (1 Pet. 2:13).

Webb (2001:213-216) suggests that instructions to wives to obey their husbands (Eph. 5:22; Col. 3:18; 1 Pet. 3:1,6) made sense in the original culture because women lacked education, social exposure and economic independence; there was also usually a significant age difference between young wives and their older husbands. These differences between husbands and wives created a hierarchy that existed apart from any biblical injunctions. Webb argues that since all the factors that created difference are cultural, as cultures change we should be willing to move up the ladder of abstraction in our application of the text because the pragmatic basis for the gender hierarchy no longer exists. He suggests that the transcultural principle of honour or respect shown by a wife to her husband can be applied in a non-hierarchical manner.

Webb (2001:220) clarifies that the pragmatic is not the only reason for the command; it is simply the most concrete expression of the command in the culture in which the text was written. He suggests that this criterion provides a helpful grid through which to interpret and apply scripture. The lack of a sustained pragmatic basis for a command is a signal that some aspect of the

command may be cultural. Webb (2001:220-1) concludes that, “The criterion strongly suggests the cultural relativity of the male/female hierarchy”.

xviii Scientific and Social-Scientific Evidence

Criterion 18, which Webb also regards as persuasive, is “Scientific and Social-Scientific Evidence”. He (2001:221) proposes that where scientific research produces evidence that conflicts with the text, that particular statement in the text may reflect a culturally bound perspective. Webb differentiates between absolute scientific data (observation or experimental evidence that would be true in any culture or situation, e.g. cosmology) and relative scientific data (an assessment or observation which is only true for a particular culture in which it was made). Webb (2001:223-229) examines biblical ideas of women as reproductive gardens (Gen. 38:9; Lev. 15:16-18), women as poor leaders (Is. 3:12), and women as more easily deceived than men (1 Tim. 2:14) and concludes that they reflect views of women which were culturally bound, and in the case of the latter two, may have been an accurate assessment of women in that particular context. Webb refers to social scientific studies on deception, which highlight issues like age, experience, education, and broad versus sheltered social exposure as factors that make a person vulnerable to deception. He (2001:229) concludes that women in Paul’s time would have been vulnerable to deception because of these factors, not simply because they were women.

2.4.3 Webb’s Conclusions

Webb (2001:241) concludes his study by suggesting that two redemptive-movement models are possible in the light of his work: complementary

egalitarianism and ultra-soft patriarchy. Complementary egalitarianism, the position he adopts in the book, differs from secular egalitarianism because it values interdependence and mutual submission instead of independence and autonomy. It also celebrates the recognition of biological, psychological and social differences between males and females. Men and women function in complementary ways, but there is no power differential based on gender.

Webb (2001:242) allows that a redemptive-movement hermeneutic does not necessarily lead to a completely egalitarian position, although it pushes in that direction. He offers an ultra-soft form of patriarchy for those who are convinced that the Bible presents a patriarchal framework for gender relationships, arguing that even within such a framework, a redemptive-movement hermeneutic calls for change. This kind of ultra-soft patriarchy would accord men a kind of symbolic honour within the context of equality between men and women.

Based on his cultural analysis of the biblical texts relating to women, Webb (2001:248-9) concludes that although God brought about improvement in the social conditions of women in their time through the biblical writers, the improvement needs to continue today. He (2001:248) writes, "While the biblical text spoke redemptively to its generation, we would not want to advocate much of the legislation we find in Scripture concerning women. Like the slavery issue, we need to reapply the spirit of the text and make things fairer and more equitable for women in our time". While, unlike slavery, patriarchy is found in the creation story, the new creation material in the New Testament appears to supersede the original creation. Since the biblical texts on women are not always clear in their meaning,

Webb (2001:250) calls for an attitude of mutual respect between those who disagree on the issue.

2.5 Criticisms of Webb's Model

Webb's proposals have generated a great deal of controversy among Evangelical Christians, with a lot of criticism coming quite predictably from those who maintain that being true to the Bible requires hierarchical or complementarian gender relationships. Criticism of Webb's redemptive-movement hermeneutic includes the following:

2.5.1 It Undermines the Authority of the Bible

Perhaps the most serious charge levelled against Webb's model is that of Grudem. Grudem (2004b:301) writes that, "Webb's trajectory hermeneutic nullifies in principle the moral authority of the entire New Testament, and thus contradicts the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*". Grudem (2004b:302) argues that whatever was written for Christians in the New Covenant age is applicable for all Christians. In contrast, he suggests that for Webb, only what passes through the filter of his eighteen criteria is applicable. From Grudem's (2004b:303) perspective, Webb does not consider the New Testament to be a perfect or final moral system for Christians, he merely sees it as a pointer towards a Divine destination. Grudem (2004b:303-4) has great difficulty with Webb's suggestion that aspects of our culture today can reflect a higher ethic than found in the literal application of some New Testament texts. Grudem (2004b:304) notes Webb's contention that the New Testament actually endorses slavery, albeit a modified and more humane practice of it, but then fails to deal with what appears to be a clear case of the New Testament not reflecting an ultimate ethic in this area of human relations. Instead

he simply states the problem this creates, Christians not being able to simply take the moral commands of the New Testament at face value. This makes reading Grudem on this point somewhat frustrating, as he appears to abandon any real examination of the example Webb uses to support his claim and simply moves on to his next criticism, that the implications of this is that, “our ultimate authority is no longer the Bible but Webb’s system” (Grudem 2004b:305).

Grudem (2004b) has accused Webb of trying to undermine the authority of the New Testament by attempting to subvert the plain and obvious meaning of texts. However, it seems that Webb is ultimately more concerned with the application of the text in a manner that accomplishes the text’s intentions. He attempts to do this, not by jettisoning the clear meaning of the text, but by relating it to its context and determining the direction in which it attempts to move or reform its context. Application from the plain meaning of the text is made to our modern context through the lens of this analysis.

By equating Webb’s concept of “static appropriation” of the text with the historical grammatical method, Gilley (2006:5) suggests that Webb is rejecting grammatical-historical exegesis of the Bible. In fact Webb actually takes historical grammatical exegesis much further and more seriously than many of his critics. Webb’s point is that we need to interpret texts within the social contexts of ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman culture as well as that of first century Israel, and only once we understand how they spoke to their culture can we understand how they address ours. Webb questions a static, literal application of texts when they are being applied in a new cultural setting.

2.5.2 It Moves Beyond the Text of Scripture

Gilley (2006:6) contends that contrary to Webb's method, we are not entitled to make applications that are not drawn from the text itself. The problem here is that what the interpreter finds in the text is inevitably predetermined by what the interpreter expects to find or not to find. Proponents of slavery insisted for many years that the text of scripture endorsed their practise. It was only when the slavery texts were interpreted within the wider canonical context of scripture and the broader ethical teaching of the New Testament, that new applications were made that did not emerge from the plain meaning of the texts. Gilley does not seem to advocate slavery, but to be consistent with his criticism of Webb he would need to. Giles' (2002) cogent argument from the slavery issue to the gender issue is pertinent here, because he demonstrates that what applies to slavery must also apply to women.

2.5.3 It is too Subjective

Webb's focus on the "redemptive spirit" of a text has been criticized by Grudem (2004b:305-6), who suggests that it is typical of a system of interpretation which is so subjective and indeterminate that no two interpreters will agree with each other. Any interpreter can read a redemptive spirit of his choosing into the text, with the result that, "the standard is no longer what the NT says, but the point toward which some biblical scholar thinks the Bible was moving" (Grudem 2004b:306). Stackhouse (2005:11) makes a similar criticism with regard to discerning the spirit as opposed to the words of a text, arguing that distinguishing between the words and their spirit is vulnerable to all sorts of abuse. This is characteristic of the weakness of Webb's model that this research seeks to address. The need for a

non-subjective destination for Webb's redemptive movement will be discussed later.

2.5.4 It is too Complicated

Grudem (2004b:318-319) has also argued that Webb creates a degree of complexity for biblical interpretation, which would be beyond the scope of all but a few seminary professors. However, the interpretation of a biblical text within the horizon of its own social and historical context has always been an essential part of the hermeneutical process. Archaeological discoveries such as the Dead Sea scrolls have been enormously helpful in developing our understanding of first century Israel and Second Temple Judaism. That they require highly specialized translation and interpretation has not rendered them any less useful. The specialized information needed for accurate interpretation is made available to less qualified biblical interpreters through commentaries and the like. Barton's (1998:17) comments seem to support the kind of complex analysis that Webb advocates, "The underlying motivation of 'historical' criticism is to free the text to speak. Where it has failed to do this, that is, in my judgement, because it has continued to be too hidebound to tradition and by the expectations of the wider religious community; and the cure is more criticism, not less." Grudem's criticism therefore lacks merit.

2.5.5 It Uses Too Many Examples from the Old Testament

A further criticism of Webb's model, noted by Grudem (2004b:314-318), is that most of his examples of incomplete ethics are taken from the Old Testament. It is hardly disputed that God did advance the ethics of the Old Testament, particularly in the ethical teaching of Jesus. Webb seems to construct a somewhat ridiculous "straw man" by asking if we should adhere to things like the constraints imposed on

raping virgins (Deut 22:28-29), the instruction to circumcise all males (Gen 17:10), and instructions not to wear garments made of more than one kind of material (Lev 19:19), and then suggesting that the obvious cultural embeddedness of these texts has great relevance for how we approach the teachings of the New Testament (see Webb 2001:14ff as one example, there are many more throughout the book). Based on the principle of progressive revelation, which is fundamental to evangelical hermeneutics, there is no question that the New Testament and the teaching of Jesus Christ supersede the ethics and law codes of the Old Testament. On this subject Thiselton (2006:638) argues that, “Even the most conservative writer accepts that, for example, a full canonical context may expand the strictly semantic boundaries of a passage in the Old Testament”.

2.6 A Critical Evaluation of Webb’s Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic

Webb makes a significant contribution with his very clear demonstration of the redemptive movement within the Bible. Through the application of his first sixteen criteria he shows how the biblical text challenges the culture to which it was written. Webb demonstrates this, while seeming to miss some important texts or components of texts. He says very little about Jesus’ attitude to women, as evidenced in his interaction with women as a first century Jewish rabbi. He also misses the counter-cultural element found even in a text such as 1 Timothy 2:11-13, where Paul’s prohibition on women teachers is accompanied by the astonishing proposal (for his culture), that women should be taught.

By examining the New Testament household codes, in particular, and showing how the implications of texts like Galatians 3:28 have now been fully realised with an issue like

slavery, he makes a persuasive argument for this to be done with gender relations. Giles (2002:215-268) examines the same texts and the history of their interpretation, and draws the same conclusions as Webb. Morphew (2009:171) calls for what he terms a “criterion of embarrassment” when it comes to the church’s historical interpretations of the Bible that support slavery. He argues that this is a powerful argument for egalitarianism.

2.6.1 The Trajectory of Webb’s Hermeneutic

The fundamental weakness that I see in Webb’s approach is that the end-point of his hermeneutical trajectory, the higher ethic that the redemptive movement he sees in the text, seems to be defined by what is currently appropriate within a liberal Western society. Webb’s own socio-cultural context is thus idealised and the text is taken to point to what is politically correct within this context. It is one thing to move from exegesis, through application, to praxis; it is another to reverse the direction of the movement, as Webb may be guilty of doing here.

This is seen most clearly in Webb’s (2001:107-8) approach to 1 Peter 3:1-6, where wives are instructed to obey their husbands so that unbelieving husbands may be won over to Christ without words, and to follow the example of Sarah who addressed her husband as “master/Lord”. Webb (2001:207) argues that, “Today, unilateral-type submission and obedience of a wife toward her unbelieving husband, adorned by her addressing him as ‘master/lord’, generally fails to fulfil the mission statements within the biblical text”. In the hypothetical case of a husband who sees his wife as an equal partner this kind of behaviour may in fact be repulsive to him, and would fail to fulfil the stated evangelistic purpose of the text’s exhortation.

Using his own western culture as the interpretive crux, Webb (2001:108) suggests that to fulfil the evangelistic intention of the text a wife would have to behave very differently to how the text instructs wives to behave. The difficulty here is that the text would mean so many things in different cultures that it would risk becoming effectively meaningless by virtue of its multiple contradictory meanings. In a highly patriarchal culture, such as found within certain African cultures, for example, one would fulfil the intention of the text by doing what it says literally. The variety of “meanings” seems only to be limited by the variety of cultures in which the text might be read. This effectively undermines the redemptive capacity of the text that Webb is trying to promote.

Webb (2001:181) also uses his own western culture as the interpretive norm when discussing his thirteenth criterion of “Specific Instructions versus General Principles”, where he uses the type of equality that contemporary culture endorses as a better benchmark for justice than the biblical text.

This is the greatest weakness of Webb’s model. The ideal ethic towards which his redemptive-movement hermeneutic points, seems to be what is currently politically correct within his own culture. This contributes to the incongruity of Webb’s (2001:241-2) conclusion that both complementary egalitarianism and ultra-soft patriarchy could result from the application of his redemptive-movement hermeneutic. Here one gets the sense that Webb is trying to keep both sides of the debate happy. But who decides what constitutes “ultra-soft patriarchy”? Surely this merely preserves and even entrenches oppressive structures? While there is no doubt that cultural factors are part of the pre-understanding that colours our reading of scripture, it seems inadvisable to set up aspects of one’s own culture as the

guiding principle by which Scripture is interpreted. This can only lead to a circular process in which, unsurprisingly, Scripture is found to echo or endorse the elements of one's culture, which were set up *a priori* as the criteria of what is best or most desirable.

This weakness in Webb's model calls for a reconsideration of what best serves as the end-point or goal of redemptive movement within the Bible. This paper will put forward the position that only an eschatological end-point is appropriate for Webb's hermeneutical trajectory because this coheres with the Bible's own teleology. More particularly, the theology of the Kingdom of God as an inaugurated eschatological reality provides an end-point that is deeply rooted in biblical theology and congruent with the overall witness of Scripture. If the New Testament does point beyond itself, and it surely does - to the person of Jesus Christ and to an eschatological consummation - surely we must understand the destination towards which the New Testament points in order to accurately determine the trajectory of its redemptive movement.

2.6.2 Webb's Eschatology

Despite referring to eschatological motifs such as the kingdom of God (2001:109), the new creation (2001:146, 148, 152), and the new humanity (2001:152), Webb does not develop these concepts or explain his eschatology. Webb also does not adequately develop his own conclusions regarding the significance of new creation/humanity texts. He mentions the eschatological dimension of these texts, but fails to develop this in any meaningful way. Webb (2001:145-6) argues that for Paul, the redemptive elements of the eschaton are already present in the "in Christ" community, and that the redemptive aspects and social modifications of the

eschaton are to be realized as much as possible in the way we live now. It is surprising, given such an acknowledgement that the eschaton is normative for Christian praxis, that Webb reverts to pragmatism to inform the goal of his redemptive-movement hermeneutic. He seems to miss the implications of his own statements on the significance of the eschaton. Webb's position calls for a much more explicit elucidation of the Bible's own eschatological framework than he provides. It is this weakness in Webb's redemptive-movement hermeneutic that this research seeks to address. The following chapters will demonstrate that when the eschaton defines the direction and the goal of redemptive movement in the Bible, the ambiguity of Webb's conclusion is resolved.

2.7 Conclusion

While Webb's argument for a redemptive-movement hermeneutic are convincing, the destination of his hermeneutical trajectory is the major weakness in his model. The following chapter will propose an eschatological model and framework that can inform and control the redemptive movement that Webb correctly discerns in the Bible. Then, rather than considering difficult texts on gender in isolation, this eschatological framework will guide and shape the *best* reading of *most* of the texts, including the *most important texts* (to use the words of Pelikan referred to earlier in this chapter), so that the Bible's intentions for men and women can be more accurately understood.

CHAPTER 3

THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND INAUGURATED ESCHATOLOGY

3.1 Why Eschatology?

A common component of nearly all Christian eschatology is the hope that one day the future of the earth, and those that live on it, will be radically different. This hope reflects the language of passages of scripture such as Isaiah 65 and Revelation 22. While there exist a variety of views on how this transformation will be effected, and on proposals for the timing of this, there is a general consensus that it involves the coming of the kingdom of God. As such, the Christian view of history, and indeed of reality, must be essentially teleological. Therefore it makes sense to view any redemptive movement in the Bible along a trajectory that is congruent with the Bible's own teleology, rather than a purely pragmatic approach where cultural relevance or acceptability shape the trajectory, as I have argued is the principal weakness of Webb's redemptive-movement hermeneutic.

Since the Bible's story of redemption is essentially teleological, it seems both obvious and necessary to first of all investigate its envisaged goal, and then to propose that goal as the end point of Webb's redemptive-movement hermeneutic. This is particularly important because the Bible is a historical record of people's experience of God's self-disclosure and saving activity. This story has an end, and the end, or goal, of the story must inform our understanding of the parts of the story.

It can not be disputed that the central figure in the Christian story is Jesus Christ, and further, that the core component of his message and ministry was the kingdom of God. A biblical theology of the kingdom of God, which understands the kingdom as the dynamic rule of God which broke into history in the person and ministry of Jesus, has become a theological framework that undergirds the belief and praxis of a number of contemporary church movements. Among these are the New Wine movement within the Anglican Church and the Association of Vineyard Churches. The work, in the middle of the 20th century, of Oscar Cullman (1952), John Bright (1953), George Eldon Ladd (1959, 1974) in particular, provided a theological foundation for this understanding of the kingdom. This chapter will provide a brief outline of such a theology of the kingdom and show why it, rather than any cultural preference, should function as an end-point for the trajectory of a redemptive-movement hermeneutic.

This will also add a more explicitly Christological dimension to Webb's redemptive-movement hermeneutic. König (1989) points out that it is in Christ that all of God's promises are fulfilled and that creation and covenant reach their goal. He correctly views eschatology as encompassing the entire history of Jesus Christ, who is the Last One. König articulates this through a three-fold schema of Christ realizing the goal of creation for us, in us and with us. König points out how eschatological language is used for all these: Jesus fulfils the goal of creation for us in the incarnation, cross and the resurrection (1989:70-75); Jesus' proclamation and demonstration of the kingdom of God initiated the fulfilment of the goal in us (1989:146-8), and this fulfilment is continued in the coming and work of the Holy Spirit, and in the mission of the church; finally, Jesus fulfils the goal of creation with us (1989:182ff) at his return at the consummation of history. König (1989:38) observes that eschatology is therefore teleological Christology.

König (1989:63) also points out that his use of a covenant framework rather than a kingdom framework is because of the bilateral nature of covenant, rather than because of any discontinuity between the two concepts, which he sees as two sides of the same coin.

If Webb's claims of redemptive movement in the Bible are correct, and I believe they are, it would be reasonable and possibly even obvious to suggest that the destination of the redemptive movement would be congruent with, and possibly identical to the destination of redemptive history. Where we are dealing with the goal of creation and redemption we are dealing with eschatology.

3.2 Recent Trends in Eschatology

It is beyond the scope of this research to engage significantly with the historical debate over what eschatology means. What follows is a summary of broad trends from the late nineteenth century onwards.

3.2.1 Ritschl to Schweitzer

In line with Ritschl's (1900) interpretation, the general trend within nineteenth century liberal theology was to focus on the ethical understanding of the kingdom and argue that it was something that should be gradually extended into all areas of society. However, in 1892 Johannes Weiss broke with the prevailing understanding of the kingdom of God as the ethical rule of God in the hearts of people and argued for an understanding that was eschatological and apocalyptic (Hiers and Holloway (eds) 1971).

Schweitzer's (1954) views epitomized this apocalyptic understanding. He understood the kingdom as future, sudden in its coming, and supernatural. It would be a dramatic event accompanied by cosmic disturbances. Jesus mistakenly believed that he could initiate this event that would bring history to an end, and in Schweitzer's (1954:368-9) famous words Jesus "lays hold of the wheel of the world to set it moving on that last revolution which is to bring all ordinary history to a close. It refuses to turn, and He throws Himself upon it. Then it does turn; and crushes Him". Schweitzer brought an end to the "Quest for the Historical Jesus", the beginnings of which are generally associated with Hermann Reimarus in the eighteenth century. While Schweitzer exposed the weaknesses of non-eschatological views of Jesus' message, showing that these were projections of liberal theology, he ultimately failed to offer a constructive alternative for these views.

3.2.2 Dodd and Bultmann

The realized eschatology of Dodd (1937) and others was in large measure a reaction to the future focus of Schweitzer. It recognized the eschatological nature of Jesus' teaching, but argued that these events had already occurred within the time of the biblical writers. Realized eschatology recognized the future aspect of Old Testament references to the day of the Lord, where the rule of God, which had been hidden in history, would be revealed. However, it asserted that within the New Testament context this day has come. A significant contribution of realized eschatology is its recognition of what has already been fulfilled. However, it seems to ignore texts such as Jesus' discourse in Matthew 25, which do not support its thesis.

Bultmann (1953) placed eschatology within his understanding of myth, and found a more significant, existential meaning behind what he saw as mythological form. He (1953:7) was highly sceptical about whether one could determine what actually happened in history (*Historie*), and focussed on the issue of “What does this mean?”, or the subjective effect of the events (*Geschichte*). For Bultmann (1953:38), the resurrection is then an assurance of victory rather than an historical event. Eschatology is demythologized and divorced from time. The question is not, “Did it happen?”, or “Will it happen in a certain way?”, but, “Am I experiencing the truths that this represents?”. What is problematic here is that the greater the divorce between *Historie* and *Geschichte*, the less the truth we experience has any basis beyond our subjective projections. However, all facts are interpreted facts; total historical objectivity is an illusion. Therefore the dichotomy between *Historie* and *Geschichte* is a false one based on historical positivism on the one hand and neo-Kantianism on the other. The split between history and theology, typified by Bultmann, creates problems for biblical interpretation. Israel's religion (and ours) is grounded in actual historical events. Biblical religion is unique in that it is not the transmission of a set of eternal metaphysical truths, but the record of God's saving activity within our own continuum of existence. The Bible contains a unique phenomenon - a revelatory history that is simultaneously event and proclamation. The language of the Bible brings event and proclamation together as a unity, and it is upon this unity that faith rests.

3.2.3 Moltmann

Moltmann's theology of hope emphasizes eschatology in such a way as to make the whole of theology eschatological. What is significant about Moltmann's work is that he ties eschatological hope to the pressing questions and concerns of history.

On this basis Moltmann (1972:370) makes a call for Christians to assume responsibility for the social and political problems of the present.

The theology of hope moves beyond the application of eschatology to the whole of theology. Rejecting traditional notions of the transcendence of God, Moltmann (1970:9f) argues for an historical understanding of reality in which God is understood in relation to time rather than space. God is ahead of us; he is the future of history. According to Moltmann (1970:20), Jesus announced the arrival of the future by bringing eschatological freedom into the present, and he anticipates the future of God, especially in the resurrection. The resurrection is where the ultimate liberation of the world begins. For Moltmann (1970:35), this hope is not simply something that the gospel announces; the gospel actually brings about this hope. The church is called to mediate the presence of Christ, who brings about the future of God. Bringing the future into the present is something that the Christian strives for. Moltmann (1972:384) writes,

“We are construction workers and not only interpreters of the future whose power in hope as well as in fulfilment is God. This means that Christian hope is a creative and militant hope in history. The horizon of eschatological expectation produces here a horizon of ethical intentions which, in turn, gives meaning to concrete historical initiatives”.

3.2.4 Recent Scholarship on Jesus and his Message

There has been a new wave of scholarship on Jesus since the early 1980's. A significant development was the creation of the “Jesus Seminar” in 1985 by Robert Funk, who was then at the University of Montana. The Jesus seminar seems to follow Wrede and Bultmann in their insistence about the opacity of history. Wright (1996:29) has criticized what he sees as their tendency to make their assumptions

their conclusions by introducing premises that are by no means certain. Wright also questions their method of deciding the authenticity of Jesus' sayings by voting on them using four different coloured beads.

Many of these scholars follow Wrede in arguing that we can know very little about Jesus. Burton Mack (1995) who follows Bultmann in particular, argues that the synoptic gospels are essentially theological fiction. Some of these scholars, such as Marcus Borg (1994) and John Dominic Crossan (1994), while following Bultmann and Wrede, do insist on the importance of eschatology within their reconstructions of Jesus and his message. Besides acknowledging their work, it is beyond the scope of the paper to examine and critique the positions these scholars take.

A significant writer in recent scholarship on Jesus is N.T. Wright. Wright, currently the Bishop of Durham, previously taught New Testament studies at Cambridge, McGill and Oxford. Within the scope of the history of scholarship on Jesus, Wright (1996:83) places himself within what he calls the "Third Quest". This broad group of scholars follows Schweitzer in placing Jesus within apocalyptic Jewish eschatology. Wright (1996:84) lists twenty significant writers within this Third Quest, including Hengel (1973), Vermes (1983, 1993), Harvey (1990), Sanders (1985, 1993) and Witherington (1990).

Wright (1996:84-85) states that a unifying characteristic of the Third Quest is its attempt to do history seriously and be guided by first century sources and the picture they paint of the Judaism of Jesus' day in order to understand his life and message. Enquiry is preceded by a rigorous method of hypothesis and verification.

Jesus' message is then evaluated in terms of the meaning it would have had within its context.

Contrary to what has been assumed by many since Schweitzer, that Jesus expected the imminent end of the space-time universe (the end of history) and the beginning of a new age that was essentially discontinuous from the present one, Third Quest scholars place Jesus within first century Jewish apocalyptic eschatology. The focus is on Jesus' talk about the kingdom of God, and how this is understood within the expectations of Jesus time.

Wright's (1996:208) table is helpful in creating a broad overview of the spectrum of understandings of eschatology.

1. Eschatology as the end of the world, i.e. the end of the space-time universe;
2. Eschatology as the climax of Israel's history, involving the end of the space-time universe;
3. Eschatology as the climax of Israel's history, involving events for which end-of-the-world language is the only set of metaphors adequate to express the significance of what will happen, but resulting in a new and quite different phase within space-time history;
4. Eschatology as major events, not specifically climactic within a particular story, for which end-of-the-world language functions as metaphor;
5. Eschatology as "horizontal" language (i.e. apparently denoting movement forwards in time) whose actual referent is the possibility of moving "upwards" spiritually into a new level of existence;

6. Eschatology as critique of the present world order, perhaps with proposals for a new order;
7. Eschatology as critique of the present socio-political scene, perhaps with proposals for adjustments.

While (1) is the traditional understanding, and Schweitzer would have advocated (2), and Bultmann (5), Wright argues for (3). I will argue that Wright's understanding of eschatology is congruent with Jesus' message of the kingdom of God, and that when this is applied to Webb's hermeneutical model it has important implications for our understanding of biblical texts that deal with gender.

3.3 The Kingdom of God

The kingdom of God has variously been understood as the church (Roman Catholicism), an ideal moral realm (Idealism), an ethical community (Ritschl), a private spiritual experience, and heaven itself (following Matthew's use of "kingdom of heaven").

Ladd (1974:46) proposes that the Old Testament concept is to be understood as theocentric and dynamic. He notes that the Hebrew word *malkuth* carries a meaning that is primarily dynamic rather than concrete, and refers to reign, dominion and rule rather than the realm over which that rule is exercised.

Bright (1953:10) acknowledges that different language is used to describe the kingdom within the Old and New Testaments, and also that the idea of the kingdom underwent substantial development within the canon of Scripture. He adds that ideas are bigger than the words that carry them, especially where the ideas themselves point to

something bigger than themselves and demand fulfilment. Bright (1953:18) suggests that it is helpful to look for the idea of God's rule in the Bible, even where the terminology used by Jesus is not present. On this basis, the idea of the rule of God over his people, and particularly the vindication of that rule at the end of history, is intrinsic to the entire Old Testament.

Ridderbos (1962:18-22) also identifies divine kingship as the core of the concept of kingdom. It involves both redemption and judgement, and is expressed in the Old Testament expectation of the "day of the Lord".

3.4 The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament

Ladd (1974:45) notes that Jesus never defines the Kingdom of God, nor is there a record of anyone asking him what the term meant. He concludes that the concept was so familiar that it did not need any explanation. To understand this one needs to understand the development of this idea in Israel's history up to the time of Jesus.

When the phrase is used of God it nearly always refers to his dominion and right to rule. Psalm 103:19 illustrates this, "The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all". In the Old Testament, God is regularly referred to as the king; God is the king of Israel (Ex. 15:18; Num. 23:21; Is. 43:15) and of the whole earth (2 Kings 19:15; Is. 6:5; Jer. 46:18; Ps. 29:10; 47:2; 93; 96:10). God is therefore king over the whole earth, but king in some special way over his people, Israel.

Behind these statements, however, are the consequences of the story of human sinfulness and rebellion recorded in Genesis 1-3. Although God gave humanity, made in

his image, authority to rule over the earth on his behalf, humanity fell by rejecting the rule of God, bringing evil, oppression and curse into human experience. In light of this, there is a tension between the recognition that God is king over all the earth, and the recognition that the earth has fallen into a state of sin that does not reflect God's rule. Therefore, even though God is already king the prophets speak of a day when God shall become king and rule over his people (Is. 24:23; 33:22; Zeph. 3:15; Zech. 14:9).

Ladd (1974:47ff) writes that arising from God's rule is his activity in visiting his people to accomplish his purposes. He points out that in Psalm 96:10-13 the cause of rejoicing is not God's enthronement as king in the heavens, but that God will come to earth to judge humanity and establish his rule effectively. Ladd argues that this idea of a "God who comes" is central to the Old Testament witness and that the whole of Israel's history, from her birth at Sinai to her redemption in the eschaton, can be viewed in light of divine visitations (see Deut. 33:2,5; Judges 5:4-5; Hab. 3:3,10,11-13).

3.4.1 The Exodus

Broadly speaking, the Old Testament picture is of a world under the sway of sin and evil, where God's rule is mostly not expressed, and his will is not done. There are instances where God breaks in and intervenes in the lives of his people. When he does this he confronts the forces that oppress them and oppose his will.

The primary example of this is probably in the Exodus event. The Exodus is significant because it reveals the redemptive, liberating effect of God's rule. The Israelites were in bondage as slaves to the power and gods of Egypt. Then God revealed himself to Moses and gave him a message to take to Pharaoh that was essentially an announcement of God's kingdom, "The LORD, the God of the

Hebrews, has sent me to say to you: Let my people go” (Ex. 7:16a). This statement is both an announcement of Yahweh’s rule, and an assertion of that rule against the powers of Egypt. The subsequent plagues, directed against specific Egyptian deities are a visible demonstration of the rule and power of Yahweh clashing against the power of the gods of Egypt. One by one the gods of Egypt are disarmed and exposed for the false gods that they are. Yahweh’s rule breaks into human history, resulting in freedom and the promise of new life in a promised land where God’s people will live in covenant relationship with God and experience the Shalom of living under his rule. Exodus 15:18, the climax of the narrative declares that, “The LORD will reign forever and ever”.

The covenant at Sinai continues to express the idea of God as king. Mendenhall (1955:26-46) drew attention to the fact that the Sinai Covenant followed the form of an Ancient Near Eastern vassal treaty. Craigie (1992:22-24) explains that a vassal treaty was used when a sovereign power such as a king unilaterally imposed conditions on a vassal which had been conquered by the king in battle. The treaty contained the terms of the relationship and the obligations of both parties. In the Sinai covenant, Israel submit themselves as vassals to the king who has liberated them from Egypt. A cultural form of Israel’s time is used to express God’s kingship over Israel and to direct the course of the relationship between Israel and her God.

3.4.2 The Monarchy

The monarchy in Israel was equally to be an expression of God’s rule, with the king essentially a vice-regent under Yahweh. Samuel expresses his confusion about this new relationship, which will make Israel like the nations around them, rather than being a nation living directly under the rule of God (1 Sam. 8:4-9; 19-22). The

king is God's "anointed one" (Ps. 2:2). The monarchy under David and Solomon represents the fulfillment of the promises God made to Israel of a good life in the Promised Land (Ex. 13:15; Lev. 20:24). In this way, the monarchy under David and Solomon provides a picture of life under the rule of God.

1 Kings 4 describes the high point of Solomon's reign and provides a vivid picture of life under the kingship of God. There is prosperity and celebration (v20), reflected in the growth of the nation and the splendour of Solomon's table (v22-23). There is comprehensive peace (v24). There is social justice and equity, with each man living on his own productive land (v25). The broad scope of Solomon's wisdom is indicative of the scope of God's concern as king; it touches the entire scope of creation (v29-33). Finally, and significantly, there is a magnetism about this state of affairs that others find attractive (v34).

The experience of God as king means living under his wise, good government rather than oppressive rule (Ps.96:10). God is king for the poor, the hungry and the oppressed. He sets the prisoner free, watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow (Ps. 146:7,9,10; 99:4).

Their experience of God's intervention in history, and with it the demonstration of his rule, led the Israelites to confess, "Our God reigns" (1 Chr. 16:31). God is king, and under God's kingship they experienced liberation from oppressive powers and structures, and life that expressed the holistic peace and prosperity of living under God's rule.

The life experienced under David and Solomon was, however, not the consistent

experience of Israel. Under a number of subsequent kings they misconstrued their relationship with God in a way that perverted their worship and corrupted the structures of their society. False worship expressed itself in social wickedness and oppression; the poor and vulnerable were oppressed. God responded by sending foreign nations as his instruments of judgment on Israel. This judgment was finally expressed in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile.

Given the very evident non-actualisation of God's rule in the life of the nation of Israel, the prophets, while pronouncing judgment on Israel, look forward to a day when God's rule will come, a day when God will become king (Zech. 14:9). There is therefore a tension within the Old Testament between the confession that God is king (present) and that God will become king (future).

3.4.3 The Prophetic Hope

Due to the reality that God's rule is only partially realized in the history of Israel, the prophets look forward to the day when God's rule will be experienced fully by not only Israel, but by all the world. Bright (1953:18) therefore defines the kingdom of God as the rule of God over his people, especially the vindication of that rule at the end of history.

Within the Old Testament prophets there is an expectation of a "Day of the LORD" when God will come to deliver and vindicate his people, bringing both redemption and judgement (Zech. 14:3-5; Is. 26:21; 29:6; 59:20; Zech. 2:10-11, cf. Is. 66:18 ff.). This expectation is the natural outcome of Israel's theology of a God who comes. With reference to this, Jacob (1958:318) writes, "The God who will manifest

himself in a mighty theophany at the end of history has already manifested himself during the course of history”.

Among the prophets, the book of Isaiah and Daniel are significant because of the way Jesus drew from them and used their promises to understand and explain his mission. While both have their primary reference point in the return from exile, their promises reach beyond their time, pointing to Jesus, and as far ahead as the end of history itself.

Isaiah declares the good news that God will come to deliver his people (Is. 40:9-10). A new Davidic king would come – the anointed one, the “Branch of the LORD”, the “stem of Jesse” (Is. 4:2). As the rule of God was expressed through David to Israel, bringing freedom from oppression, the new David would come with justice and righteousness for all nations (Is. 11:4-5). Isaiah spoke of a Divine salvation that would reach the ends of the earth. It would be universal and eternal (Is. 49:6; 51:4-6). The Hebraic concept of “salvation” is described by the concept of “Shalom”. As Volf and Bass (2001:95) point out, this is a social concept that encompasses health, salvation and security. It implies complete wholeness. The reign of God would affect every dimension of humanity, and every part of their environment.

Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (of a human image being struck by a stone that falls from heaven and then grows until it covers the earth) as the rule of God breaking into history and confronting fallen human power. The stone crushes the image. The dream speaks of something that is not initiated by humans, but by God, which fills the whole earth (Dan. 2:31-45).

In one of the most explicit prophetic statements of the extent of the coming kingdom, Zechariah writes that, “The LORD will become king over all the earth” (Zech. 14:9). There would be no part of earthly existence that would not come under the domain of Yahweh’s rule; every part of human life would be impacted by God’s reign.

Ladd (1974:59) points out that although the Old Testament hope was an eschatological hope, it was still an earthly hope because the biblical idea of redemption includes the earth. This is in contrast to the idea of a non-material “spiritual” redemption found in Greek thought. The redemption of the earth is expressed in passages such as Isaiah 65:17 and Isaiah 66:22. The earth, and all of its structures, has been so deeply affected by sin that God himself must come to effect redemption. This divine visitation is so extraordinary that the earth is disrupted and the structures of human society are shaken (Is. 13:13; 34:4 51:6; Hag. 2:7). This disruption is not destructive but restorative and creative (see for example Is. 32:15 and 35:2).

Ladd (1974:65) writes that the eschatological hope of the prophets was inextricably linked with their immediate historical future. He writes, “They viewed the immediate future in terms of the ultimate future without strict chronological differentiation and thus proclaimed the ultimate will of God for his people here and now”. In that sense they were more concerned with the ethical impact of the future on the present than they were in details of chronology.

Following the period of the exile, there was a reinterpretation of prophetic promises. A significant development within apocalyptic was an eschatological dualism

between “this age” and the “age to come”. This terminology is used in Baruch and IV Ezra, and later on in the New Testament. Ladd (1974: 91) argues that the concepts which gave rise to this terminology must surely precede it, and that they can be found in the promises of radical transformation of the present order that are found in the Old Testament prophets.

In *The New Testament and the People of God*, Wright (1992:259-68) argues that Israel understood herself to be the linchpin of what God was doing, and would do for the whole world. When Israel was restored the whole world would be restored. Speaking of first-century Jewish use of kingdom language, Wright (1996:202-3) points out that it was bound up in these hopes and expectations. The phrase was a Jewish way of talking about Israel’s God becoming king, and when this happened, the whole of creation would be restored. In terms of Israel’s nationalistic and religious expectations this would involve Israel’s return from exile, Yahweh’s return to Zion, and evil (often in the form of Israel’s enemies) would be defeated (Wright 1996:206).

Eschatology, then, within the context of first-century Judaism, doesn’t mean the end of the world, but the rescue and renewal of Israel, and through Israel the world. König (1989:19) argues that a number of themes and expectations that develop in the Old Testament, including the Day of the Lord, the rule of the Lord, and the Davidic kingship, come together and find their fulfilment in Jesus. Jesus is therefore the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophetic hope, and the embodiment of the kingdom of God.

3.5 Jesus and the kingdom of God

3.5.1 The kingdom Announcement

Wright (1996:226) points out that Jesus' announcement that "The kingdom of God is at hand" only makes sense if the hearers know the story up to that point and are waiting for it to be completed.

The wonderful promises of Isaiah, Daniel and other prophets found partial fulfilment within their historical contexts, but remained unfulfilled through hundreds of years of apparent divine silence and inactivity. Then the prophetic voice is heard again in Israel. John the Baptist appears, and Luke records that the *dabar Yahweh*, the word of God, came to John in the wilderness (Luke 3:2). John announced that God was about to act; the kingdom of God is at hand and will be inaugurated by a "coming one" whose arrival would separate the righteous and the wicked (Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16). Mark 1:14 then records that, "After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" This claim of fulfilment is echoed in Luke 4:18-21 where, after reading Isaiah's promise of messianic salvation, Jesus says, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing".

Wright (1996:172) points out that when Jesus spoke of the 'kingdom' of God, he was deliberately evoking a story-line that he and his hearers knew quite well. Wright (1996:172) states further that Jesus' use of the phrase was not an invention of his own.

"It spoke of covenant renewed, of creation restored, of Israel liberated, of YHWH returning. It can be reduced neither to a general existential state of

affairs, unrelated to Israel's national hope, nor to a hypothetical 'parousia' hope, nor to the offer of a new type of private spirituality".

An examination of Jesus' ministry reveals that many of his actions point to the fulfillment of the promise of the kingdom. This is particularly evident with the feeding of the multitude. Moses led Israel to safety in the wilderness where God taught and miraculously fed them. When they wandered, God was their shepherd. Moses prayed that another shepherd would be raised up to give the nation ultimate security (Num. 27:17). Ezekiel promised that the Davidic Messiah would shepherd the people of God in the wilderness (Ezek. 34:5,23,25). Jesus chose to take his disciples to rest in the wilderness (Mk. 6:31-32). The people came to him and he taught them many things and fed them miraculously from a few loaves and fishes. He had compassion on them like the true shepherd of God (Mk. 6:34).

Wright (1996:228) points out that Jesus' explanation of the exorcisms in Luke 11:20 and Matthew 12:28 make a statement about the presence of the Kingdom: "If I by the finger of God cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you". The prophetic hope was that Israel's God will become king one day; this will involve the defeat of the enemy that has kept Israel captive. In Jesus' actions, Yahweh is becoming king and Israel is being liberated.

Wright (1996:125-127) argues that in Jesus' time, Israel's self-understanding was framed within a story of exile and restoration. The parable of the prodigal son captures these themes in a subversive retelling of the story. Israel went into exile because of her disobedience and foolishness. Israel is returning because of the

generous love of her God, and more than that, the real return from exile is taking place in Jesus' own ministry.

However, while Jesus reaffirmed the Jewish beliefs and expectations of the kingdom, he reinterpreted their fulfillment in a radical way. Jesus announced that the long-awaited kingdom was busy coming, but that it did not look like what Israel expected.

The parables of Jesus simultaneously describe what the kingdom is like and inaugurate it by inviting people to participate in its story. However, they offer a new understanding of Israel's story and her dream of liberation, and at the same time they challenge people to a praxis which is radically different from the prevailing religious order.

With reference to Luke 15:1-2, Wright (1996:129-130) argues that in Jesus' reconstitution of the people of God, he bypasses the temple and ethnic boundary markers, and claims to admit all kinds of people into the renewed people of God. As Jesus eats with sinners and women and tax collectors he claims that when he does this, Israel's God is doing it. Israel's God is welcoming all kinds of previously excluded people into the renewed people of God.

The poor, the marginalised and sinners were the recipients of Jesus' kingdom invitation, summoned to follow him and then to live differently as participants in the kingdom story. Willard (1998:42-49) points out how what he calls "gospels of sin management" have distorted Jesus' kingdom invitation, and reduced Jesus challenge to repent and believe to a formula for avoiding eternal damnation. Wright

(1996:251) argues that the kingdom invitation and challenge was both an eschatological call and a political call that summoned Israel to abandon one set of agendas and follow another. The repentance that Jesus spoke of was both personal and corporate, and it would be a mistake to think that one excludes the other. The concept of repentance was well known within Judaism, and the eschatological national repentance associated with the return of Yahweh to Zion would include personal repentance within it.

On the surface, Jesus' call to repentance might seem similar to calls issued by groups like the Essenes, which were essentially a call to return to Torah. What is significant about the repentance that Jesus called people to, and what was scandalous to the religious leaders of his day, is that it consisted of allegiance to Jesus himself rather than to the Law or the temple.

Wright (1996:263) makes an important point with regard to Jesus' call for faith,

“The call to ‘believe in the gospel’ or ‘believe in me’ do not suggest that Jesus was inviting Galilean villagers to embrace a body of doctrine – not even a basic ‘theory’ about ‘salvation’ and how they might attain it, nor, again, very much of a Christology....Nor does it suggest that Jesus was offering them what we today would call a new ‘religious experience’. It evokes the historical picture of one who believed that, with his work, Israel’s God was inaugurating his long-awaited kingdom”.

Wright (1996:272) makes an equally valuable point about Jesus' offer of forgiveness of sins and the scandal this caused,

“It is not enough to prove, as Sanders, Charlesworth and many others have

done quite satisfactorily, that first century Jews were not in fact proto-Pelagians who thought they could earn the divine forgiveness. The point at issue was not that Jesus was offering forgiveness where the rabbis were offering self-help moralism. The point is that *Jesus was offering the return from exile, the renewed covenant, the eschatological 'forgiveness of sins' – in other words, the kingdom of god. And he was offering this eschatological blessing outside the official structures, to all the wrong people, and on his own authority*".

3.5.2 The Reign of God Demonstrated

Jesus' works of power were essentially signs of the presence of the kingdom. Meyer (1979:155-6) argues that Jesus saw his deeds of power to be signs of the dawning eschaton. Meier (1994:399) regards Jesus' response in Luke 11:20, to the accusation that he was driving out demons by the hand of Beelzebub, as the "star witness" for the presence of the kingdom in Jesus' ministry.

Wright (1996:191) makes a significant point about what Jesus' works of power signify, "For a first-century Jew, most if not all of the works of healing ... could be seen as the restoration to membership in Israel of those who through sickness or whatever had been excluded as unclean. The healings thus function in exact parallel with the welcome of sinners, and this, we may be quite sure, was what Jesus himself intended". The healings were therefore part of the welcome to previously excluded people that was part of the kingdom invitation. The controversy caused by Jesus' acts of power (Matt. 12:22f; Luke 11:14f) suggests further that he was perceived to be a threat to the social and religious world of his day.

König (1989:11) writes that it is clear that whenever Jesus expels the adversary, whenever he breaks the enemy's hold over people or heals their suffering, the Old Testament expectation of the kingdom has become a reality in Jesus. Morphew (1991:44-45) makes an important point about the clash of powers inherent in the coming of the kingdom,

“Running through the entire ministry of Jesus is the same sense of confrontation that we saw in the Old Testament picture of the kingdom. But the enemy now assumes a different shape. He is no longer identified with particular nations and the gods that rule them, but with all the evil of the world and all opposition to God. The final cosmic battle has begun. The strong man himself comes into view: his fortress or headquarters is being attacked (Mk. 3:26-27)”.

Wright (1996:195) also argues that Jesus understood himself to be fighting a battle with a real enemy. According to Wright (1996:593-4), Jesus believed that, in a variation of the eschatology of the Jewish worldview of his day, he was living in and putting into operation the controlling story the scriptures offered him, and this story was reaching its climax. Jesus announced the end of the present evil age, a different, subversive form of revolution, and the renewal of the people of Yahweh on a basis that excluded the temple and the identity markers of first-century Judaism.

3.5.3 The Timing of the Kingdom

There has been a lot written about the timing of the Kingdom. Is it future (Schweitzer (1954), Weiss (1971)), present (Dodd (1937), Bultmann (1953)), or in some sense both (Jeremias (1963), Ladd (1959, 1974))?

There are certainly texts in the gospels that use language indicating that the kingdom is already present. The kingdom has come in the person and mission of Jesus (Matt. 12:28). Ridderbos (1962:61) points out that it is the power and presence of the kingdom that explains Jesus' authority over demons. Ladd (1974:113) points out that Jesus' response to John's question, recorded in Matthew 11:4-4, echoes the promise of messianic salvation in Isaiah 35:5-6. The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and good news is preached to the poor. Ladd (1974:113) suggests that, "The point of Jesus' answer is that fulfillment is taking place without the eschatological consummation". Furthermore, Jesus didn't just speak about the kingdom, he was the message himself. Ladd (1974:169) concludes that, "The kingdom is God's redemptive rule, now present in the person, deed, and words of Jesus".

There are also texts such as Matthew 8:11-12, Matthew 13:39-50 and Matthew 25:31-34 that speak of the kingdom as future, possible in some distant sense, and others such as Luke 9:27, Matthew 16:28 and Mark 9:11 which place the kingdom in the immediate future. The kingdom is therefore present and future, imminent and delayed. Dunn (2003:466) points out that both the present and future strands of Jesus' teaching on the kingdom are present in all the traditions reflected in the gospels; therefore Jesus' teaching was remembered as having both emphases.

Ladd (1974:113-14) argues that something happened in the person and ministry of Jesus which fulfilled the Old Testament promises. However, alongside these sayings about fulfillment in history, there are equally significant sayings about a

future coming of the kingdom. This presents a problem that has dominated studies on the kingdom of God. How can the kingdom of God be both present and future?

Both König and Wright address this question through their focus on Jesus himself, and the meaning of his coming. König (1989:39) writes, “Once Jesus is seen as the goal of creation and the *eschatos*, the consummation can be seen as reachable (in one sense, as already reached!) before the end of world history. This is possible because the *eschatos* is a person, not just a set of forthcoming things”. König’s (1989:85) critique of the salvation-history view of eschatology is that it elevates time as the guiding principle of eschatology. If eschatology is primarily about the end being reached as time lapses, then delay becomes a problem. But if eschatology is defined by the goal that God envisaged for creation, which is fulfilled in Christ, then eschatology is concerned with the person of Christ rather than the passage of time.

Wright (1996:221) points out that the issue of timing is tied to the issue of content. We can only know if something is present or future if we know what the thing is that we speak of. In this case, it is the arrival of God, the return of Yahweh to Zion.

Wright (1996:471-2) argues that the crucial phrase in the issue of timing is “is at hand”, in Greek *engiken*. How this phrase is understood is largely determined by how scholars view the nature of the kingdom. For example, if it meant the end of the space-time universe, this has obviously not happened; neither did the meaning that would have made sense to Jesus’ contemporaries – that Herod was no longer ruling Judea as the instrument of Roman dominion. However, as Jesus defined the kingdom it was becoming present. He (1996:472) writes, “Israel’s God was

becoming king in and through the works of Jesus; this kingdom would reach its climax in a battle which he was going to Jerusalem to fight.... YHWH would be king, and the true Israel would at last be redeemed from her exile”.

Ladd's (1974:218) thesis is that the redemptive reign of God, which will appear as an apocalyptic event at the end of history has already come into human history in the person and mission of Jesus to overcome evil, to deliver people from the power of evil, and to bring the blessings of the future age into the present. With regards to the issue of timing, there is therefore fulfillment without consummation. The mystery of the kingdom that Jesus spoke of in Mark 4:11, is its unexpected breaking into history before its expected coming at the end of history. God's rule will break into human history one day with power, completely displacing human sovereignty, just as Daniel prophesied. However, from the coming of Christ until that day the kingdom is at work in an unexpected way. It has come in humility, cloaked with servanthood, offering the gift of salvation to any and all who would respond to the news of God's intervention with faith and repentance.

The reality that the kingdom is both “now” and “not yet” creates an eschatological tension. This eschatological tension between the presence of the kingdom and the future coming of the kingdom means that the Christian life is lived simultaneously in this age and the age to come, and is marked by the experience of both realities. The kingdom has come; the reign of God is breaking into this world. This calls us to live in the present in light of future reality. We are called to live in a manner that embodies the eschatological goal of creation, even if there is incompleteness, as we await final consummation. Faith and hope give the Christian life a forward

focussed orientation, in which we pray, as Jesus taught us, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10).

3.6 What about Paul?

The scope of this research does not permit a detailed examination of the theology of the Apostle Paul, especially in terms of its coherence with Jesus’ teaching on the kingdom of God. James Dunn (2006:461-498) provides a comprehensive examination of Paul’s theology, and demonstrates that it falls within the same framework of inaugurated eschatology, with the resultant eschatological tension, that exists in Jesus’ announcement of the kingdom. Like the gospel of John, which uses the concept of eternal life in a parallel way to the synoptic gospels’ use of kingdom language, Paul uses different language to Jesus, and draws on both the Old Testament and Greco-Roman culture for metaphors and analogies to expound his theology. Dunn (2008:401) also notes how Paul’s use of the aorist and future tenses creates an eschatological tension.

Schreiner (2006:228) notes that while Paul generally places salvation in the future, he also speaks of it as having taken place in the past tense because the age to come has invaded this present evil age. Cullman (1952) also demonstrates the eschatological tension in Paul’s theology, and shows how it coheres with Jesus’ teaching.

Rausch’s (2003:84-85) statement captures how ubiquitous this theology of the kingdom is in the New Testament, “The kingdom of God is at the heart of Jesus’ message; it appears in the Q tradition, in Mark, in the material unique to Matthew and Luke, and in John. It is the centre of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and the subject of most of his parables. It appears throughout the Pauline corpus”. This theology of the kingdom is

present throughout the Old Testament, it is the central theme of Jesus' message and ministry, and it is equally characteristic of Paul' writing.

3.7 The Kingdom and the Church

Wright (1996:276) suggests that Jesus intended to establish cells of followers who would be distinctive in their communities because they had adopted his praxis. Within the early church, kingdom language seems to have functioned as a kind of summary description for the preaching and message of the church. Wright (1996:215) notes that even in this new context, kingdom language retained the key elements of monotheism, election and eschatology, giving rise to the expectation that the creator would act again within history to bring the kingdom fully into existence.

What is unique about kingdom language in the early church is firstly that the kingdom is seen as belonging to God *and* the messiah (Eph. 5:5). For Wright (1996:216), 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 is a key passage in which the point is made that, "... the creator god is completing, through the messiah, the purpose for which the covenant was instituted, namely dealing with sin and death, and is thereby restoring creation under the wise rule of the renewed human being". He adds that the significant difference between this view and those found in non-Christian, second-Temple Judaism, is that the kingdom is in some sense already present and in another sense still future. He (1996:217) writes, "We see here exactly that tension between present realization and future hope which is so utterly characteristic of early Christianity as a whole and so puzzlingly opaque to generations of modern scholars".

Another unique feature of the early church's view of kingdom is that the story of the kingdom is told without reference to the national liberation of Israel and the praxis of the

kingdom is no longer based on the Torah. The picture has been expanded to a redeemed humanity and a restored cosmos. Wright (1992:268) has pointed out that the fate of the nations was inextricably bound up with the fate of Israel, and what happens to the Gentiles is conditional on what happens to Israel. He (1992:268) writes, “The call of Israel has as its fundamental objective the rescue and restoration of the entire creation. Not to see this connection is to fail to understand the meaning of Israel’s fundamental doctrines of monotheism and election”.

3.8 Conclusion

Wright (1992:476) notes that first century Jews looked forward to a public event by which their God would demonstrate to the whole world that he was not just a local, tribal deity, but the creator and sovereign of everything. He points out that the early Christians looked back to an event in and through which, they claimed, Israel’s God had done exactly that.

In Jesus, the Messianic king, all of Israel’s hopes find their fulfilment and become a reality. The New Testament proclamation of the gospel, while it takes different forms, expresses this central idea. In Jesus the New Age of God announced by the prophets had begun. Jesus is the promised Messiah, and this has been demonstrated by his words and mighty works, and also, in a convincing manner by his death and resurrection in fulfilment of the scriptures and subsequent ascension to heaven. The arrival of the rule of God in the person and ministry of Jesus creates a crisis of decision where people have to respond to Jesus, either with repentance and faith or with unbelief.

Morphew (1991:23) writes, “The Davidic picture teaches us to avoid all attempts to

reduce the rule of Jesus to a purely 'spiritual' and personal experience. If the kingdom had such massive scope for ancient Israel, how much more should the reign of Jesus fill his church?". The reign of God that has broken into history in Jesus, although not fully actualized, has every element of life on earth within its redemptive scope.

3.8 Implications

Schlabach (2004:367) writes, "Christians live in a meantime between Jesus' resurrection and a cosmic resurrection – between God having already made the reign of God present in Jesus Christ, and God not yet having brought the fullness of that reign at the culmination of history". He notes that a full appreciation of the "already" of this eschatological tension leads to a view of the Christian life in which "God's Spirit is always offering new possibilities, and empowering people of faith to live now according to the future".

The presence of the kingdom brings the blessings of the future age into this present age. Even though Christians continue to experience the reality of personal sin and of living in a world full of evil, they are described by the writer to the Hebrews as those who have tasted the powers of the age to come (Heb. 6:5).

Moltmann (1972:382) is correct in insisting that Christian hope creates ethical imperatives which are then expressed in concrete action. The future, where everything is made right, has broken into the present in Jesus. This determines our identity and our mission in this world. Our mission is to bring the future into the present. The pictures of the reign of God in the Old Testament such as the Exodus and the monarchy under David and Solomon do not permit this future to be reduced to a private spiritual experience. On the contrary, it touches every area of life on earth. Similarly, the review

undertaken of the prophetic hope of the Old Testament reveals a future that includes cosmic renewal as well as personal and corporate redemption. This eschatological framework should therefore be a controlling feature of any theology of gender, or any extrapolation of gender roles from biblical texts.

In Jesus' reinterpretation of Israel's prophetic hope, he moved the boundary markers of the people of God to embrace those who had been previously excluded, particularly Gentiles, women and the poor. Ethnicity and gender are explicitly superseded by faith in Jesus. Jesus' message offers us a new understanding of the human story, and invites us to believe that in him God is redeeming humanity and dealing with sin, and more than just believing, it invites us to participate in his redemptive mission. It would be entirely incongruous to propose that this participation in God's mission could be authentic while the church excludes people on the basis of categories that, for Jesus, do not delineate membership in the people of God.

Webb's redemptive-movement hermeneutic has been criticised for its subjectivity and for making politically correct western culture the norm for interpreting Scripture. If this inaugurated eschatology becomes the controlling factor for Webb's redemptive-movement hermeneutic and defines the goal of its trajectory, these weaknesses are addressed. Furthermore, the following chapter will show how various eschatological motifs in the New Testament depict an eschatological egalitarianism that is coherent with the redemptive movement Webb detects in Scripture.

CHAPTER 4

INAUGURATED ESCHATOLOGY AND GENDER

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine eschatological motifs from the Bible to see how they shape a hermeneutical trajectory and define its endpoint with regard to gender. I will examine the implications of the inaugurated eschatology proposed in the previous chapter for gender roles in the Christian faith community. I will do this by looking at Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit, by considering the significance of the “in Christ” texts in the New Testament, and by examining “New Creation” language in the New Testament and reflecting on what it means to be created in the image of God and the eschatological hope of the full restoration of the *imago dei* in humanity. Finally the resurrection will be investigated for clues to the nature of gender relationships.

4.2 Pentecost and the Eschatological Gift of the Spirit

The presence and work of the Holy Spirit is characterized by the eschatological tension of the “already” and “not yet” kingdom. Christians are filled with the Spirit, and experience the Spirit’s power in their lives. However, this experience of the Spirit is partial and really only a foretaste of the age to come. König (1989:42 italics his) argues that because Jesus is creation’s goal, this goal is reached when he comes, “*every time he comes!*”. The coming of the Spirit, who is the Spirit of Christ, at Pentecost is therefore an in-breaking of the rule of God that continues and advances the becoming present of the kingdom in Jesus.

Pentecost is fundamentally eschatological; it brings the powers of the coming age into the present. Ladd (1977:245) points out that for Luke the coming of the Holy Spirit is the fulfilment of Old Testament eschatological hope. Moltmann (1977:202) argues that the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is the eschatological sacrament of the kingdom. Marshall (1977:91) points out that from the outset the activity of the Holy Spirit is characteristic of the new age. In König's schema (1989:43, 97f) referred to in the previous chapter, the coming of the Holy Spirit and the work of the Holy Spirit in the church age is the second mode in which Christ accomplishes the goal of creation.

The power of the eschatological gift of the Spirit falls on men and women at Pentecost. Joel 2:28-29 anticipates this, and Peter's speech at Pentecost reflects the fulfilment of this eschatological promise.

A significant component of Pentecost is its reversal of Babel, creating a new humanity and bridging the divisions of language. The subsequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Samaritans and then Gentiles completes this. As Smalley (1991:253) points out, the linguistic miracle of Pentecost is not repeated, because with *glossolalia*, or speaking in tongues, people do not hear their own language spoken. Pentecost is therefore in some sense a re-gathering of the people of God out of multiple ethnic groups, breaking down the boundary markers of ethnicity and Torah that were characteristic of Second Temple Judaism. Where women were also marginalised in Judaism, they are now explicitly included through their receiving the gift of the Spirit.

The presence of the Spirit in the church is demonstrated through gifts that are distributed to both men and women, including the gift of prophetic utterance. 1 Corinthians 11:4-5 implies that women prayed and prophesied in the gathered community of faith. It is

probable these two words summarise all speech in church, with prayer directed to God and prophesy including teaching and exhortation to the church. Ellis (1978:160) has shown that the charismatic prophets of the Pauline communities were teachers of wisdom. Since gifts often determine leadership within the church, it follows that leadership roles should be based on the presence of these *charismata*, rather than on gender.

There is therefore equality between men and women in the eschatological gift of the Holy Spirit, and the charismatic gifts distributed by the Spirit. It is noteworthy that even in the Old Testament such anointing could elevate women to leadership in a society dominated by men (e.g. Judges 4-5). The Spirit determines gifts and leadership roles to an even greater extent in the New Testament. Gordon Fee (2004:241) describes how the gifting of the Spirit, rather than gender, should determine ministry roles within the church.

The outpouring and presence of the Holy Spirit creates a community of the age to come. In Ephesians 3:10 Paul describes this community as a visible expression of the rule of God, both to the world around it and to the visible and invisible “powers”. As a community of the age to come, it should be axiomatic that the church embodies and typifies the characteristics of life under the rule of God, rather than life under the curse of sin, or life under the powers of this world and this age.

4.3 “In Christ” Texts

Dunn (2006:481) argues that Paul’s use of the phrase “in Christ” reflects the same eschatological tension that is apparent in Jesus’ message of the kingdom of God. The

believer is simultaneously “in Christ” and “in Adam”, or living “according to the sinful nature” or “according to the Spirit”.

Thiselton (2000:90) writes of Paul’s use of the phrase in 1 Corinthians, “To be in Christ is to experience the eschatological tension whereby God has already showered his grace upon them and redeemed them from bondage; yet believers still sin, still die, and still need full transformation into the image of Christ. ... Christians experience Christ and his gifts now; but there is immeasurably more to come when redemption is complete”.

Galatians 3:26–29 is one of a number of “in Christ” texts that describe the new reality created by the in-breaking reign of God. The future, which is already breaking into the present, should define and shape the Christian faith community in all areas of life, including gender relationships. The church is to demonstrate what the future world is like, in a unity that transcends gender, class, and racial divides.

The context of this passage is Paul’s defence of his doctrine of salvation, and how it creates a new identity which transcends human categories. “You are all children of God, through faith” (3:26). Believers are now “in Christ”. Paul’s language here reflects the eschatological tension in his theology, which was noted in the previous chapter. The kingdom of God moves us out of one age and brings us into an experience of another age. In this totally new sphere or reality of the kingdom, former distinctions no longer apply. The eternal future of the Messianic kingdom has become an “already” for those who are “in Christ”. In this “already” of the kingdom we transcend gender differences.

The equality described by this passage is equality in essential being and value. In Christ both men and women participate equally in the people of God. The old boundary

markers of the people of God (law, circumcision, ethnicity, and, in a patriarchal distortion, gender) no longer define its borders. In the same way that Jesus radically reinterpreted membership in the people of God, and included those who were previously excluded or marginalized, Paul moves away from the Torah and circumcision as boundary markers, and insists that Jesus and the Spirit now define the people of God.

Paul's argument in Galatians ends with his insistence in Galatians 6:15 that "what counts is a new creation". Morphew (2009:163) writes, "This new reality relativises and transcends the previous age. It no longer 'counts'". Morphew (2009:163) argues further that this new reality has social implications because it describes a new community that cuts across the social norms of the present age. It transcends religious barriers, class barriers and gender barriers. He notes that while it is true that the differentiation of these categories remain, the rights of those concerned are radically altered.

Ridderbos' (1997:83) observations on the scope of Paul's "in Christ" statements are significant. He notes Paul's description of God's redemptive plan in Ephesians 1:10 as bringing all things under heaven and earth together in Christ, or by summing them up in Christ. A similar idea is found in Colossians 1:16-20. All things were created for Christ and in Him all things "hold together" (NIV), or "find their proper place" (TEV). König (1989:27) notes how Ridderbos draws a distinction between the *de facto* and *de jure* statements in Colossians 1:17b, arguing that it does not say that all things have always been in their proper place in Christ, or that they are already in their proper place, but rather that it is only in Christ that this can happen. König (1989:27) notes that this is the only rendering of Colossians 1:17 that gives Paul's later statement in 1:20, about Christ reconciling all things, coherent meaning. The goal of creation is therefore both directed towards Christ and fulfilled in Him. This bringing together of all things in Christ

specifically includes powers and authorities; the structures and ideologies that dominate society therefore find resolution “in Christ”.

4.4 The New Creation

Paul’s statement about a new creation in 2 Corinthians 5:17 links this reality to the status of the Christian as “in Christ”. His use of the phrase in Galatians 6:15, with its reference to circumcision reflects back to the breaking down of ethnic, and by implication gender, barriers “in Christ” (Gal. 3:28), and his statement in Galatians 5:6 that the only thing that counts is faith, not the identity markers that characterised Second Temple Judaism.

The goal of creation and covenant in the *eschaton* surpasses creation itself as the expression of God’s ideal for humanity in relationship with him, and therefore in relationship with each other. Morphew (2009:162-3) argues that in the new creation the equality between the sexes must predominate over any inequalities based on the original creation, and also over the inequality characteristic of a fallen world.

4.4.1 The Restoration of the Image of God

Genesis 1:27 states that we are made in God’s image as male and female; in some mysterious way it is only as male and female together that humanity reflects the image of God. This is consistent with the Trinitarian revelation of God as a relational being. With sin and the fall, this image of God is damaged and eroded. The relational alienation characteristic of sin reflects this attenuation of the image of God.

Whether the image of God is understood as referring to some substantive aspect of God’s nature that we share, or it is understood in relational terms, or even

functionally, the restoration of God's image in humanity has significance for gender relationships. This is especially true of relational understandings of the image of God, which suggest that our pattern for relationships is the God who is revealed in Scripture as a Trinity. It is equally true of functional understandings of the image of God that highlight our capacity to exercise dominion and our responsibility as stewards who rule on God's behalf.

The new person in Christ, with the image of God fully restored, anticipates the day when we see Him and will be made like Him. Through the Spirit the Christian is taken up into the Trinitarian relationship. Jesus' discourse in John 13–17 speaks of the day when we will be in God, and the Father and the Son will be in us, and our union with Him will be like the union of the Father and the Son through the Spirit. This future is already present through the life of the Spirit. Here, eschatology merges into Trinitarian theology.

4.4.2 Trinitarian Analogies and Gender

Our understanding of the Trinity has implications for our beliefs and praxis regarding gender. Paul makes deductions about gender roles from a Trinitarian analogy in 1 Corinthians 11:1-3. If man and woman are made in the image of God, extrapolation about how they should relate to one another can be made from what God is like.

Our understanding of God, and specifically the question of subordination and/or equality between the persons of the Godhead, is important, and there has been considerable debate around this issue. Those who argue for a permanent hierarchical relationship between men and women argue for the eternal

subordination of the Son to the Father. This is seen in Knight (1977), Hurley (1981) and Piper and Grudem (1991). Those who argue for an egalitarian relationship between men and women, such as Giles (2002) argue for the eternal equality of essence within the Trinity.

The Ante-Nicene Fathers were essentially subordinationist, viewing the Father as the source or *monarche* of Divinity, with the Son second and the Spirit third. The development of Trinitarian theology in response to Arianism led to the Nicene Creed of 381 AD, which affirms that the Son is of one substance with the Father. The Nicene Creed also introduces concepts that were later defined in terms of a distinction between the immanent Trinity, which is eternal, and the economic Trinity in which the Son becomes incarnate to effect salvation. In the Trinitarian formulation of the Nicene Creed there is a temporal subordination of the Son to the Father in the incarnation, which is preceded and followed by eternal equality.

The Athanasian Creed goes even further than the Nicene Creed, asserting that, “In this Trinity none is afore or after another; none is greater or less than another. But the whole three persons are coeternal, and coequal” (Articles 25-26). With regard to the incarnation it states, “Equal to the Father as touching his Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching his manhood” (Article 33).

Reformed scholars Charles Hodge (1965:96-97) and Louis Berkhoff (1969) argue for a subordination of women to men based on subordination in the Trinity. Knight (1977:56) argues that just as the Son is eternally subordinate to the Father in role but not essence, so women are to be permanently in submission to men in role, but not essence. A 1999 report of the Sydney Anglican Diocesan Doctrine Commission

entitled “The Doctrine of the Trinity and its Bearing on the Relationship of Men and Women” (included as an appendix in Giles, 2002) asserts that the subordination of women to men is ontological; it is a subordination of essence or being.

Complementarian scholars such as Piper and Grudem (1991) also argue for an eternal subordination of the Son to the Father in role, not essence, and argue from that to the subordination of women in role, even if they are equal in essence. Typically this differentiation in roles is seen to continue into the coming age because of the Son’s eternal subordination to the Father.

Grudem (2004: 405-414) argues that the subordination of the Son is shown by many biblical texts to precede the incarnation and is therefore eternal, not limited to the incarnation. The Son is destined to be the redeemer before the foundation of the world (Romans 8:29; Ephesians 3:1-5; Revelation 3:8). The relation of priority was there eternally. The Father created *through* the Son (John 1:3). These show an eternal difference of role. After Christ returned to the Father he continued to have a subordinated role, evident from the many texts that describe him as taking up his position at the *right hand* of the Father. According to Grudem (2004:410), to sit at the king’s right hand in the ancient world indicated being alongside the king, not the king.

Grudem (2004:414-429) argues further that this subordination of role, not essence, is the historic position of the church. He claims the support of Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, Warfield, Berkhoff, Kelly, Bromiley and others. The historic position is to oppose subordinationism, that the Son is less than the Father *in essence*, or being, but to support subordination, that the Son is eternally subject to the Father in role. Grudem (2004:429) argues that Giles and other egalitarians have merely caused

confusion with words. Further, to speak of a mutual submission within the Trinity is the true novelty. This imposes a modern politically correct notion of equality onto the theology of the Trinity.

There are, however, significant problems with the arguments that complementarians use to argue for the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father. Morphew (2009:56-64) demonstrates Grudem's erroneous use of sources, particularly Athanasius, Warfield and Kelly, in claiming their support for his position. Grudem quotes the Athanasian Creed where it uses the word "begotten", but never the references to equality. Morphew (2009:57-59) shows how, in claiming Warfield's support, Grudem cites a passage where Warfield speaks of a technical subordination in the "modes of operation". Grudem ignores what Warfield writes before and after this citation to show why one cannot argue from eternal generation to eternal subordination. Morphew (2009:60) writes, "Clearly, Warfield draws exactly the opposite conclusion from the language of eternal generation to Grudem. It is mischievous for Grudem to enlist Warfield's as a support by a citation taken out of context, which could cause us to read Warfield to mean the exact opposite of what he means".

Morphew (2009:60-62) shows that Grudem similarly misuses a citation from Kelly to misrepresent Kelly's analysis of Augustine's view. What Kelly (1968:273) actually writes is, "The unity of the Trinity is thus set squarely in the foreground, subordinationism of every kind being rigorously excluded. Whatever is affirmed of God is affirmed equally of each of the three Persons. Since it is one and the same substance which constitutes each of Them, not only is the Father not greater than the Son in respect of divinity, but the Father and the Son together are not greater

than the Holy Spirit, and no single Person of the Three is less than the Trinity Itself". It is difficult to comprehend such a reckless use of sources from a well-respected evangelical scholar such as Grudem.

Erickson (2000:85) differentiates between eternal subordination and incarnational subordination, and notes that the subordinationist view described above argues for an eternal, asymmetrical relationship within the Trinity between the Father and the Son, and by extension, the Spirit as well. He contrasts this view with another, which he adopts. This view argues for the eternal equality of the three persons of the Trinity and the symmetry of their relationship to one another in their essential status. The biblical statements about the Father begetting the Son are applied only to the incarnation. In this view, there is not an asymmetrical relationship of generation. Not only do the Son and Spirit derive their being from the Father, but they also derive it from one another, as does the Father from each of them. More than that, this view asserts that there is a mutual subordination of each to the other, and each member of the Trinity serves each of the others (Erickson 2000:86-87).

Giles (2002:29-58) demonstrates the long history of those who follow Athanasius in rejecting any form of subordinationism. He (2002:17) argues that the idea of eternal role subordination is a recent, novel idea that arises from the desire to create legitimacy for social conservatism in gender relationships. He (2002:111) accuses modern evangelicals of beginning with a view of gender relations and then projecting that onto the Trinity.

Pannenberg (1991:313) also rejects any subordination of the Son to the Father, arguing instead for a mutual dependence which is seen in the Father giving all rule

to the Son at the resurrection, and then the Son handing back all rule to the Father (1 Cor. 15:28).

Modern Eastern Orthodox theology stresses the perichoretic unity of the Trinity, in which the three persons completely contain and interpenetrate one another. Moltmann (1993:140) argues that Western Christianity has developed defective theology based on an understanding of the trinity that emphasises unity at the expense of the separateness of the three persons.

Wood (2005:204) notes how, beginning with the Cappadocian Fathers, the Trinitarian relationships were defined in terms of reciprocity and mutual interpenetration. The Father exists in the Son, and the Son in the Father, and both in the Spirit; and the Spirit exists in both the Father and the Son. Each person of the trinity possesses unique personal characteristics, which at the same time differentiate them and bind them together. It is precisely because they are different that they are able to be one. Within the unity of the Trinity there is an eternal circulation of perfect love in unbroken fellowship.

Boff (1988:135) also suggests a dynamic state of perichoretic interpenetration where there is an active reciprocity between the persons of the Trinity. He points to the Father acting through the Spirit in the incarnation of Jesus, and God acts through Christ in the giving of the Spirit after the resurrection (John) and at Pentecost (Acts). For Moltmann (1993:178), the goal of creation and redemption was that men, women, and all of creation would be drawn into the perichoretic “circulation” of the triune God.

Both Moltmann (1993) and Boff (1988:58-64) assert that the history of God with us, as a history of the persons of God, provides us with a social-relational doctrine of the Trinity. Boff (1988:236-237) argues that society “offends the Trinity” when it organizes itself on the basis of inequality, and that it honours the Trinity when organised on a communal basis that seeks to bring justice and equality between all people. Boff’s correction of hierarchical understandings of the Trinity forms the basis for his deconstruction of hierarchical relationships in the church and society.

If the ultimate destiny of humanity is to be taken up into the Trinity in some profound sense, then the mutuality, reciprocity and equality between the members of the Trinity must surely be the defining model for all human relationships, including gender relationships. If biblical revelation on gender is moving towards the eschatological goal where not only is God’s image in humanity restored, but humanity is caught up into the life of the Trinitarian God, then the biblical revelation on gender is of necessity directed towards equality.

4.5 The resurrection

The resurrection of the body is an integral component of eschatological hope (1 Corinthians 15; Luke 20:27-39). In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul links the resurrection of our bodies with the risen Christ. In Philippians 3:21 Paul writes that our bodies will be like his glorious body. Therefore the body of the risen Christ is a prototype for the resurrection of our bodies, and informs our understanding of the nature of this. Jesus did not become androgynous or a-sexual.

Jesus’ only words on gender relations in the age to come (in Luke 20:34-38 cf. Matt.

22:29-30) have to be treated with caution as he was responding to a trick question about marriage from the Sadducees, not explaining gender roles. However, Jesus' reply does suggest that humans move beyond the need to procreate, but not beyond our sexual identity. Jesus teaches that while gender differentiation is not transcended in the coming age, relationships are significantly altered (Luke 20:27–39). This teaching is all part of the New Testament expectation of the resurrection of the body. Since we will have immortal, imperishable and eternal bodies, conditions in the first creation such as the need to procreate, or even the need to survive in nature, will be transcended. Thus, the “new creation” substantially transcends the “first creation”.

It must also be noted that the power that transforms the body at the resurrection is the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit brings the future into the present, but in a way that is partial and incomplete. At the resurrection, the power of the Holy Spirit will be experienced to a degree that is utterly transforming and which reconstitutes our humanity.

4.6 Implications

4.6.1 Gender Roles in the Christian Faith Community

The writings of the apostle Paul provide the major New Testament source data for the application of the gospel and its implications within the life of the early church, particularly with regard to gender roles. Yet, Paul seems to contradict himself by allowing women to prophesy (1 Cor. 11:5), commanding them to be silent (1 Cor. 14:33b-35), not permitting them to teach (1 Tim. 2:11-15), but also designating certain women as apostles and in other leadership roles (Rom. 16:1,3,7; cf. Acts 18:18-26).

The household codes of Ephesians 5, Colossians 3 and 1 Peter 2:11 – 3:7 also describe hierarchical relationships between men and women, with their concept of male headship. These are linked with passages such as 1 Corinthians 7:20-23; 1 Timothy 6:1-2; Titus 2:9-10 by their shared treatment of slavery. How are these texts to be reconciled with an eschatological egalitarianism?

Giles (2002:215-268) and Webb (2001) both demonstrate that the household codes in Ephesians 5:21-6:9, Colossians 3:15-4:1 and 1 Peter 2:11-3:8 link practices with regard to slavery and the relationships of husbands to wives in such a manner that one cannot argue for the emancipation of slaves without accepting a revision of the husband wife hierarchy these texts contain. Keener (2004:v-xx, 184-224) draws the same conclusions. The household codes were a convention of Greco-Roman society rather than a picture of ideal Christian relationships. Morpew (2009:128-131) argues that far from representing some kind of ideal, the use of these codes by New Testament writers is aimed at urging them to live in a way that does not hinder the gospel by offending the surrounding culture. Morpew points out that there is a subversion of the prevailing household codes through a practice similar to rabbinic *Midrash*, where the writers use Old Testament examples to urge good behaviour, and things like mutual submission are introduced rather than unilateral submission.

Stackhouse (2005:61-62) points out with regard to Paul's instructions in Ephesians 5:21-33, that society has already awarded power to masters, parents and husbands. Instead of advocating a revolution that overturns all of these relationships, Paul commands a remodelling of these relationships that plants the seeds of emancipation.

Yoder (1994:181-82) writes that,

“For a first-century husband to love (*agapan*) his wife, or for a first-century father to avoid angering his child, or for a first-century master to deal with his servant in the awareness that they are both slaves to a higher master, is to make a more concrete and more sweeping difference in the way that husband or father or master behaves than the other imperative of subordination would have made practically in the behaviour of the wife or child or servant.”

This is because in the Mediterranean world of the first century, all social power was in the hands of men. Scholer (1987:416) demonstrates that the overwhelming perception in that context was of the inferiority of women. They were to be submissive in everything, stay at home, be silent, and never provide leadership of any kind.

Stackhouse (2005) offers an entirely plausible explanation for the apparent contradictions in New Testament teaching on gender roles in the church, which he locates within the same “kingdom of God” theological framework used in this research. He (2005:42) suggests that the tension between egalitarians and complementarians can be understood in terms of the eschatological tension created by the presence of the kingdom. While complementarians could be accused of living in the past with too little of the “already” of the kingdom, egalitarians may well be guilty of an over-realized eschatology where there is not enough “not yet”. He (2005:42) writes,

“What, however, would our understanding of gender look like if we took the ‘already but not yet’ principle seriously? What if we were to expect, instead of one extreme or the other, an appropriately paradoxical situation: a slow and

partial realization of gospel values here and there, as God patiently and carefully works his mysterious ways along the multiple fronts of kingdom advance?”.

Stackhouse (2005:47) notes Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 10:23-24, “‘Everything is permissible’ but not everything is beneficial. ‘Everything is permissible’ but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.” There are similar statements in Galatians 5:13-14, 1 Corinthians 8:12-13 and 1 Peter 2:16. Stackhouse (2005:47) points out that these deal with actions, which are not sinful and are legitimate in themselves. They become illegitimate if enjoying them impedes the supreme cause of the spread of the gospel.

With regard to gender roles in the church, Stackhouse (2005:50) notes the clear presence in the New Testament of hierarchies in the church and the home. However, he suggests that Paul means *everything* he says about gender, not just the control texts cited by one side or the other. To illustrate this, he (2005:51) notes that even in his own setting Paul believes that women should keep silent in church and that they should pray and prophesy. He (2005:51) writes, “How can they do both? By being silent at the right times and by praying and prophesying at the right times”. Where women use their newfound freedom to disrupt meetings with inappropriate questions, Paul instructs them to ask their husbands at home. Thiselton’s view (2000:1155-6) is similar, in that he translates “women should remain silent” as “women should allow for silence”, and argues that the “speaking” Paul is attempting to regulate is sifting of prophetic speech that is disruptive, rather than speech of any kind. Barnett (2000:265-66) takes a similar position.

The debate over gender roles in the church tends to hinge on the interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:1-5. Complementarians such as Hurley (1981), Knight (1992) and Grudem (1991, 2004) argue that Paul's instructions here are binding for all time. Feminists such as Schussler Fiorenza (1984, 1992) view the passage as patriarchal, and reject it. A third position sees the text as dealing with an unusual and particular situation. Kroeger and Kroeger (1992) provide evidence for an incipient Gnosticism, linked with the cult of Diana/Artemis, which involved women in dominant roles. Keener (2004:265) points out the existence of myths such as the Amazon myths and those related to Artemis, and suggests that these could have prompted patterns of female dominance, particularly in Ephesus. Belleville (2004:219-221) shows how the evidence of women's dominance in the cult of Artemis provides the background to Paul's teaching. Marshall (1999:441) argues that this passage needs to be linked to other passages that deal with false teaching, and places the "silencing" of women alongside the prohibition of false teaching by men (1 Tim. 1:3; 4:7; 6:3; 2 Tim. 2:16,23).

The crux of the debate becomes the meaning of *authentein* in verse 12. Grudem (2004:304-318) argues that it simply means to have authority, with no connotation of dominance. Others, such as Belleville (2004:209-212) and Marshall (1999:458) argue that it carries the idea of domineering authority. Marshall points out that the word Paul uses is highly unusual. There are only four significant uses recorded before the Christian era, suggesting a nuance that would not be communicated by more common words. He concludes that the meaning of "domineering authority" fits best into the context, "which is characterized by argumentation and dogmatic intimidation" (Marshall 1999:458).

Witherington (1988:132) writes of this passage, “One cannot assume that the prohibition would extend beyond the period of the abuse, or beyond cases where similar abuses might arise elsewhere”. Witherington (2006:232) points out the progressive features of 1 Timothy 2:11-15. In a cultural context where women had been excluded from education of any kind, Paul makes the revolutionary statement that “a woman must learn”. Witherington notes that the susceptibility of women to deception is certainly linked to their exclusion from learning, and points out that once women have been taught there is every likelihood that the limits Paul places on them teaching will fall away.

With regard to leadership, Stackhouse (2005:52-53) points out that women were not trained to exercise public leadership over mixed groups, and that society would have found such a practice scandalous. He notes that 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is preceded by an instruction to cause as little scandal as possible for the sake of the gospel. Stackhouse (2005:53) further argues that Paul is not forbidding women from leadership “forever and in every circumstance”, but temporarily accommodating himself to the global reality of patriarchy. He points out the presence of anomalies, such as Priscilla instructing Apollos, Lydia offering leadership, and women like Pheobe and Junia bearing the titles of deacon and apostle. Here Stackhouse’s position correlates closely with Webb.

Stackhouse (2005:56) points out that all Christians have come to see that the social conservatism of the New Testament with regard to slavery was a temporary matter; he argues that its approach to gender needs to be seen the same way. He (2005:56) writes,

“When society was patriarchal, as it was in the New Testament context and as

it has been everywhere in the world except in modern society in our day, the church avoided scandal by going along with it – fundamentally evil as patriarchy was and is. Now, however, that modern society is at least officially egalitarian, the scandal is that the church is not going along with society, not rejoicing to let women and men serve according to gift and call without an arbitrary gender line”.

Stackhouse (2005:56) argues in a footnote to this that the modern secular drive for the liberation of women is a secularized form of what the Bible teaches about the equality of men and women, pointing out that it is no coincidence that feminism has emerged in a Judeo-Christian social context, and not in other cultures.

Stackhouse’s position of the “already” and the “not yet” existing in tension with each other when it comes to description of gender roles in the New Testament is a satisfactory explanation of the apparent contradictions within the New Testament. However, the existence of this tension should never become an excuse to avoid the implications of the kingdom by choosing some comfortable middle ground that fails to challenge the fallenness and injustice of those aspects of human existence that have not been transformed by the presence of the kingdom. Within the constraints of any social context, the church needs to live in such a way that they embody God’s will, and function as a prophetic voice to society. Where the gender roles of a society are regressive in comparison to the eschatological picture in the Bible, this will be a challenge. Given the eschatological goal described by the Bible, it is unthinkable, in societies that exhibit values of equality and justice, that the church adopts a praxis that is regressive in comparison with its social context.

Peter Davids (2004:238) makes a similar point with reference to 1 Peter 3:1-7,

“When addressing those without power (slaves and wives), [Peter] does not call for revolution but upholds the values of the culture insofar as they do not conflict with commitment to Christ. He then reframes their behaviour by removing it from the realm of necessity and giving it a dignity, either that of identification with Christ or identification with the ‘holy women’ of Jewish antiquity. When speaking to the ones with power, however, he asks them not to use their power but to treat those they could dominate as their equals – for in fact they are. ...The question for today is, will men/husbands try to hold on to an authority over their wives that was once given them by the surrounding culture but now for the most part they no longer have? Or will they gladly drop power, as well as the pretense to power, and treat their wives as equals, reaping not only a more intimate marriage relationship but also divine pleasure”.

Davids (2004:235) argues that a direct application of Peter’s teaching in modern and postmodern societies would subvert its original intention.

Even though much of the New Testament’s writing on gender appears regressive when compared with contemporary Western society, the Biblical writers are quite revolutionary in the way they introduce reforms into the prevailing social structures and give unprecedented levels of dignity and participation to women.

4.6.2 Equality and Difference

The Bible bears witness to a number of differentiations. There is differentiation within God; God is triune and not a monad. There is differentiation between God and creation. This is an ontological dualism; God is not identical with the cosmos,

nor is creation an extension of God's being. There is also an ethical dualism that differentiates between good and evil. Humanity is differentiated from the rest of creation, and set over creation, as being in the image of God. Humanity is differentiated as male and female. These differentiations operate on different levels. The Trinity is a relationship that reflects differentiation without dualism, the relationship between God and nature is differentiation with dualism, and the relationship between humanity and nature is one of differentiation and hierarchy. What is significant is that Trinitarian Theism allows for differentiations, dualisms and hierarchies.

Monism rejects all dualisms and differentiations, especially a God who is transcendent. From an origin of a monad, monism moves towards the collapse of all differentiations into a reconstituted monad. Chapter 1 argued that this movement is typical of much feminist thought. Although feminism criticizes binary oppositions and dualisms, it fails to offer real possibilities for resolving them. In fact it could be seen to sustain these dualisms with its categories of male-female oppression.

4.6.3 The Mystery of Male and Female

Writing from an Eastern Orthodox perspective, Karras (2002:246) critiques western thought for defining the juxtaposition of two different concepts or qualities as mutually exclusive opposites. She traces this dualism to Hegel. She (2002:246) writes, "The problem with Hegel's theory of the resolution of the tension between thesis and antithesis is that, usually, the synthesis can reconcile opposites only by eliminating part of what made them opposites to begin with". She points out how Eastern Christian theology sees complementarities rather than opposition, and where this is not possible, tries to hold diametric opposites together in tension, in all

their fullness, rather than trying to diminish either to resolve the dialectic with a synthetic singularity.

While his position on gender roles seems to fall within the category of patriarchal, Karl Barth has some valuable insights into this mystery of equality and difference. Because humanity is made in the image of God, the Triune nature of God is reflected in the relational nature of humanity. Barth (1960:117) writes, “God created them male and female, corresponding to the fact that God Himself exists in relationship and not in isolation”.

This leads to the formula Barth uses repeatedly (1960:118). “We have to say both that man is necessarily and totally man *or* woman, and that as such and in consequence he is equally necessarily and totally man *and* woman. He cannot wish to liberate himself from the differentiation and exist beyond his sexual determination as mere man.” He describes this as a “breathhtaking dialectic of difference and affinity”.

The exact nature of this distinction remains a mystery. Barth (1960:151) argues that we don’t have any right to define or describe this differentiation, especially in terms of some Divine command. Barth (1960:151-2) completely rejects all attempts to provide a “typology of the sexes” because these always turn out to reflect human suppositions and personal impressions.

The Trinity, not creation or culture, is the paradigm for human relationships in the eschaton. The patterns of patriarchy (and the power differential that arises from this) in creation are clear. I would argue that far from creation representing the ideal, it sets

humanity up in a probationary way. The power imbalances in male-female relationships, even prior to the fall, cannot be resolved unless both man and the woman live in a manner that is derived from their immersion in the life of God. When this Trinitarian life and love undergirds male-female relationships, it makes the same kind of love and the same quality of relationship possible between man and woman.

4.7 Conclusion

Through the application of his eighteen criteria, Webb convincingly demonstrates how the books of the Bible address their own culture in a manner that is progressive in comparison to the prevailing culture. Furthermore, he shows clearly that even though the Bible's position is progressive by comparison with its own culture, it can be viewed as regressive when compared with other cultures. In the same way as the New Testament does not present an ultimate ethic on slavery but rather regulates it (given cultural constraints) and plants the seeds of slavery's demise, the New Testament stretches its own culture with regard to gender roles, without insisting on the equality that is reflected in Christ, and therefore in the eschaton.

When used to define the trajectory of Webb's redemptive-movement hermeneutic, the theology of the kingdom of God presented in this research creates a picture of egalitarian gender relationships and charismatically determined gender roles in the church. Given the Bible's own teleology and the theological weight of the theology of the kingdom of God, it would be incongruous to read Paul's need to regulate the behaviour of women, in contexts where there is strong historical evidence to support theories of female dominance and over-assertiveness in those cultures, as definitive of the New Testament ideal for gender roles in the church.

CHAPTER 5

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

5.1 The Gender Debate in Evangelical Christianity

Evangelicalism seems to be in danger of being driven by historical debates and party lines more than by Scripture itself. The history of those who have interpreted the Bible to defend the indefensible is long and embarrassing, whether this has been a geocentric universe, or the idea of the Divine right of kings, or the support of slavery, or the subordination of women.

Postmodern philosophical hermeneutics correctly challenge many of the assumptions of evangelical hermeneutics, particularly the idea that one can objectively discover the meaning of a text (or set of texts, as is the case in the gender issue). Tradition, the choice of control texts, the selection or non-selection of material in historical reconstructions etc., all allow the interpreter to construct a meaning that is congruent with his/her assumptions. That meaning is then defended as though Christianity itself depended on it.

Deconstructive readings of the bible and of evangelical theology can provide a stimulus for essential self-reflection. Their demonstration of the role that the interests of individuals and groups play in constructing meaning is valuable, particularly given underlying social and cultural power imbalances. However, one cannot go as far as placing meaning entirely in front of the text. It may be true that the connection between words (as signifiers) and the signified is arbitrary. But these signifiers assume a range of

meaning (either narrow or broad) that makes texts intelligible. Fish and Rorty would surely not apply their criteria of meaning to road maps or recipes. Cape Town is Cape Town, and a potato is a potato!

The witness of the Bible points to a goal. It presents a redemptive history that is going somewhere. More than that, the Bible presents itself as a record of God's self-disclosure within human history. That record is necessarily embedded in the language and culture of its time. The books of the Bible also address and confront specific historical and contextual issues. However, revelation itself is essentially an in-breaking of the rule of God. It is God, the King, breaking into the assumptions and norms of a fallen world and challenging them. Webb is correct in discerning redemptive movement within the Bible that creates a hermeneutical trajectory. However, this trajectory leads to an eschatological goal, not to what is pragmatic or politically correct within any particular culture.

Those who are in Christ live *in* inaugurated eschatology. The in-breaking rule of God means that the eschatological future becomes present prior to the termination of this age. As the eschatological future breaks into the present age, it confronts fallen male dominance and brings the eschatological future of equality into the present. The privatisation of the kingdom, in which it is limited to individual experience, or its placement solely at the end of the space-time universe, have deprived the Christian faith community of the imperative to live as the new humanity the kingdom creates.

5.2 Practical Implications

There is an imperative for Christians to live out the implications of the prayer, "Your

kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven". Just as it did with Jesus, the in-breaking reign of God will precipitate a confrontation with prevailing powers. There is a clash of kingdoms as the Kingdom of God breaks in and confronts the power structures of this present evil age. We therefore agree with Moltmann (1972) that the Christian hope is militant. It is proactively reaching for a hope that it longs to see realized. This hope creates ethical imperatives that demand action.

When Christians, who are the beginning of a new humanity and bear the eschatological presence of the Spirit, are confronted with the evil of human injustice, it should cause a simultaneous response of indignation and hope that forms and informs their praxis. Their transformative influence on society must move humanity forward towards the goal of creation and redemption.

Finally, there is no escape from the cross as the paradigm for eschatological life and hope. Jesus' humanity does not just offer affirmation of our humanity, both male and female; at a fundamental level it offers the full transformation of our humanity. To stop at the level of affirmation avoids the mystery of the cross. The cross calls for self-sacrifice and servanthood rather than self-promotion and entitlement. It calls both men and women to experience the paradox, that it is in giving that we receive, and in losing our lives that we find them.

5.3 Where to from here?

5.3.1 Language and Meaning

Dunn (2003:93) writes, "The main impact of postmodernism ... has been to call into question the traditional hegemony of the author, to liberate the meaning of texts from their originating context, and to bring the reader to centre-stage in the

hermeneutical process”. As a result there is no longer a text, only interpretations. Dunn (2003:96) notes that this destabilizing of the concept of meaning has an explicit political agenda: to liberate the meaning of texts from dominant interpretations of the past, which are now perceived to be oppressive.

This crisis of meaning presents challenges for biblical theology, which deals with a text with the goal of finding meaning in its message, especially where there is a commitment to the text of Scripture as authoritative in some sense. Can we discover God in the text of the Bible, or do we only see our own vague reflection in the mirror, both formed and distorted by layers of tradition that we have received?

Vanhoozer (1998) offers insights into a way forward based on the Speech Act theory of J. L. Austin, and particularly John Searle. He also draws on the interpretation theory of Paul Ricoeur, and the thought of Jurgen Habermas in which language is communicative action. Texts are therefore communicative acts. Vanhoozer (1998:218) writes, “To be precise, meaning is a three-dimensional communicative action, with form and matter (propositional content), energy and trajectory (illocutionary force), and teleology or final purpose (perlocutionary effect). This “action” model of meaning provides the best account both of the possibility of stable meaning and the transformative capacity of texts”. Vanhoozer’s analysis of the current hermeneutical impasse and his proposals to move beyond it are complex and highly nuanced, and even a cursory discussion of his work is beyond the scope of this research. Further studies could dialogue between Vanhoozer’s work, and the underlying Speech Act theory of Searle in particular, and feminist hermeneutics or the eschatological trajectory proposed by this research.

5.3.2 Theology

In *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*, Stanley Grenz and John Franke (2001) propose a method that moves beyond the epistemological foundationalism that has characterized theology since the Enlightenment. Theology is seen as arising out of an interplay between the Bible, tradition and culture. The Spirit speaks authoritatively through the biblical text, tradition provides a historical interpretive framework, and culture provides a context for constructive theological reflection. They (2001:175) propose a theology structured around the motif of the trinity, on the basis that, “The biblical narratives speak of three historical encounters with God: with the one God of Israel, with Jesus the incarnate Son, and with the Spirit as the manifestation of the ongoing presence and guidance of God in the community and in the world”. While these narratives bear witness to God’s involvement in the world, they also point beyond this to the eternal Divine life. The narratives of scripture invite theologians to consider the internal and external aspects of God’s life and the implications of this.

Grenz and Franke’s work offers possibilities for further study on gender issues, especially as a narrative Trinitarian theology of gender.

5.4 Concluding Thoughts

The Christian God acts and reveals himself in the history of this world. This is the God who becomes present with humanity; this is the God who breaks into human history to save and restore. The Bible is an inspired record of God’s saving activity and God’s self-disclosure in our world. The aim of this self-disclosure and saving activity is to restore our relationship with God, and to redeem and transform all of creation. In *Transformation*

Theology: Church in the World (2008), Davies, Sedmak and Janz proceed from the premise that revelation is concrete Divine causality. In this sense, what we understand as revelation in various ways are actually instances of God's rule breaking into our world. God's word to particular people in particular places at a particular time is an in-breaking of the Kingdom. It simultaneously reveals God, confronts sin and injustice, and urges transformation. Word by word, verse by verse it nudges us towards the eschaton, by pointing towards the One who it calls the *Omega*, the End.

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