

**Using the Old Testament in Christian ethics:**

**The story of Judah and Tamar**

**by**

**LEONORE PIETERSEN**

**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree**

**MAGISTER ARTIUM**

**in**

**CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND DOGMATICS**

**UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA**

**SUPERVISOR: DR W FOURIE**

**CO-SUPERVISOR: DR E MEYER**

**APRIL 2014**

## SUMMARY

This study contributes to the available knowledge on the difficulty of using the Bible as a source in Christian ethics. In the study, the use of the Old Testament in Christian ethics is explored and analysed. The central research question is: What makes the use of the Old Testament in Christian ethics so difficult? The research findings reveal that the relationship between ethics and culture is problematic and contributes to the challenge of using the Old Testament in Christian ethics. The study is descriptive and is informed by research that has been done in the fields of Biblical Criticism and Christian ethics.

The study focuses on methods and traditions of Biblical Criticism and Christian ethics that can play a role in interpreting biblical narratives in the Old Testament. It is important to look at the various tools and methods of Biblical Criticism to interpret biblical narratives and broaden our knowledge of biblical texts. Relevant approaches in Christian ethics can be useful in making pertinent contributions on moral issues since the focus is on character and community, and biblical texts can be used to shape moral identity.

To demonstrate how a specific text in the Old Testament can be used in Christian ethics, the narrative of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38 is discussed in terms of character and community. The objective of this part of the study is therefore to show how Biblical Criticism and Christian ethics can be used when interpreting a text. The main argument is that Christians often find it difficult to integrate ethics and culture because the relationship between ethics and culture is problematic. The challenge is how one should interpret ethics, in this case Christian, in a particular culture as it plays an integral part in identity and moral formation.

Key words: Christian ethics, culture, Biblical Criticism, historical-critical approach, literary-critical approach, biblical interpretation, relationship

## DECLARATION

"I declare that the dissertation, which I hereby submit for the degree Magister Artium Christian Ethics and Dogmatics at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution."

## ABBREVIATIONS

**NV-** No volume

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary .....	i
DECLARATION.....	ii
ABBREVIATIONS.....	iii

### CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1	Background.....	1
1.2	Problem statement.....	2
1.3	Purpose of the study.....	3
1.4	Methodology.....	5
1.5	Chapter outline.....	6

### CHAPTER 2: THE PLACE OF GENESIS IN BIBLICAL CRITICISM

2.1	Introduction.....	8
2.2	Overview of the book of Genesis.....	9
2.3	The inclusion of the narrative of Judah and Tamar in the Joseph narrative.....	10
2.4	A diachronic or synchronic approach to biblical texts.....	11
2.5	The historical context.....	13
	2.5.1 The documentary hypothesis.....	14
	2.5.2 The life setting of Israel.....	16
2.6	Narrative criticism .....	18
2.7	The social world of the Bible.....	20
	2.7.1 The patriarchs of Israel.....	23
	2.7.2 The religion of the patriarchs .....	26
	2.7.3 Morality in terms of cultural practices.....	27

2.7.4	The levirate law.....	28
2.8	Trickery and deception.....	31
2.9	Interpretation issues.....	33
2.10	Conclusion.....	39

### **CHAPTER 3: THE USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN CHRISTIAN ETHICS**

3.1	Introduction.....	41
3.2	The development of Christian ethics.....	42
3.2.1	The early church.....	44
3.2.2	Philosophy.....	47
3.2.3	Developments in theology.....	49
3.2.4	The use of biblical texts in Christian ethics.....	51
3.3	Different approaches to the use of the Old Testament in Christian ethics.....	55
3.4	The moral authority of the Bible.....	57
3.5	Christian ethics and persons of character.....	59
3.5.1	Character formed within the community of faith.....	63
3.5.2	Narrative.....	64
3.5.3	History and tradition.....	66
3.7	Christian ethics and gender.....	67
3.7.1	Patriarchy.....	68
3.7.2	Gender roles .....	69
3.7.3	Gender in the Old Testament.....	70
3.8	Conclusion.....	71

### **CHAPTER 4: THE STORY OF JUDAH AND TAMAR**

4.1	Introduction.....	72
4.2	The narrative of Judah and Tamar.....	72
4.3	Understanding Genesis 38 in terms of Biblical Criticism.....	74

4.3.1	The social world of the narrative.....	75
4.3.2	The theme of the promise of progeny.....	77
4.4	The use of the narrative in Christian ethics.....	80
4.5	Shaping character in terms of Genesis 38.....	82
4.5.1	A character of trickery.....	84
4.5.2	The community in Genesis 38.....	85
4.6	The feminist challenge.....	90
4.7	More difficulties when using Genesis 38 in Christian ethics.....	91
4.8	Connecting the world of the text with the world of the interpreter...	93
4.8.1	The narrative in current society.....	95
4.8.2	Pluralism in society.....	98
4.9	The role of biblical interpretation in Christian ethics.....	100
4.10	Challenges in interpretation.....	102
4.11	Conclusion.....	104

## **CHAPTER 5:**

<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>106</b>
------------------------	------------

Bibliography.....	116
-------------------	-----

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

Various sources give formative quality to ethics. The Bible serves as a primary source of Christian ethics (Fowl & Jones 1991:1). Christians claim that the Bible provides information for research and moral principles to govern conduct. Hence, it informs their values, religious beliefs, and moral codes and principles. This applies equally to the Old Testament and the New Testament as both have shaped Christianity. Each of the testaments concerns people's relationship with God, be it the people of Israel or the Christian community (Birch 1991:19). Cahill (2002:3) points out that the link between biblical texts and ethics is intricate. It may, however, be dangerous to consider these texts as unchanging documents for ethical living since biblical writers portrayed behaviour that best illustrated devotion to God in their own communities (Cahill 1996:5 & 6).

Today, conditions have changed and command different reactions from Christians than in the past. The Old Testament has become a neglected source of Christian ethics. In defending the validity of using it, Barton (1998a:17) asserts that the Old Testament should not be seen as a font for moral rules but rather as an example of human life and the trials and tribulations people encounter in society. In this study I examine and critically analyse the use of the Bible in Christian ethics, with specific focus on a biblical text in the Old Testament. This study contributes to the available knowledge on the use of the Old Testament in Christian ethics, especially with regard to the relationship between ethics and culture.



## 1.2 Problem statement

The use of the Old Testament in Christian ethics has been a subject of research for many years and it is the topic of numerous discussions. It would appear that the problem is that it is difficult to use biblical texts for ethical formation and the Old Testament texts are ignored. The central research question of this study is: What makes the use of the Old Testament in Christian ethics difficult? Part of the problem is the complexity of events that are captured in the Bible. The moral world of the Bible is complex (Birch 2007:338–347). There are often circumstances in biblical texts that are not in line with what is acceptable in conventional thinking. It could therefore be argued that it is a challenge to attempt to make sense of the communities of the Old Testament and to try to determine what impact their representation of God may have had on them. It seems that efforts to establish how God communed with the people, as represented through narrative, can be beneficial to Christian ethics.

This study is informed by two fields of study, namely Biblical Criticism and Christian ethics. A vast array of literature is available in both the field of Biblical Criticism and the field of Christian ethics. However, researchers struggle to find conceptual models to direct believers in making ethical judgements about narratives in the Old Testament. This makes it hard to use the literature in a way that can contribute to understanding and applying the narratives in terms of ethics. An important element of understanding the narratives is the awareness of theology. It is important to consider that the text provided information to the community of the time about the theology of their distinctive social group(s). If the text has to be used as a source for ethics today, it is essential to consider how it can inform the individual about the way he or she has to live a moral life in his or her society.

It would appear that in order to shape a moral way of thinking, biblical texts are often read selectively to focus on issues that have to be dealt with at a

given time. This is reason for concern because in theology, the biblical message is best received if it is read within the context from which it derived. It is therefore important to look at how the narrative functioned within ancient Israelite culture (Carr 2005:1–5). This raises acute awareness that biblical texts convey information to the contemporary person about the interaction between Israel and God (Mills 2001:1–10). The current reader is told about individuals who lived within the society portrayed in the text. The question is whether the Christian can differentiate between the meaning of the text and his or her moral life, cultural setting and own unique circumstances – in particular his or her understanding of God as handed down in his or her own faith community (Cahill 2002:16–17). It is clear from the above that biblical interpretation is pivotal; but, then again, interpretation in itself has its own complications.

### **1.3 Purpose of the study**

My initial intention with this study was to restrict my research to the complex use of the Bible in Christian ethics and to do so by looking at Genesis 38. My aim was to focus attention on the connection between ethics and culture in the narrative of Judah and Tamar. However, as the study progressed, the task became more difficult than I anticipated and I had to consider whether the material in the Old Testament is simply too complex to understand without the necessary historical tools provided by Biblical Criticism. It became clear that the link between ethics and culture may not only be limited to the text but may also pose a problem of interpretation in current society. Therefore, the person who reads and interprets the text has to consider not only the relationship between these two factors in the text, but also its significance within his or her own world.

The objective of this study is therefore to investigate the difficulty of using the Bible in Christian ethics, especially in respect of a text from the Old

Testament. Ultimately, the focus falls on the relationship between ethics and culture. To this end, I concentrate on the narrative of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38. This narrative contains the necessary analytical tensions that are relevant for a discussion on using the Old Testament as a source of Christian ethics. In order to contribute to addressing the moral issues, a look at how an Old Testament text such as Genesis 38 can be related to Christian ethics is important.

In this dissertation I therefore substantiate the claim that the use of the Old Testament is a challenge in Christian ethics because of the tension that exists not only between the ethics and culture in the text but also between the ethics and culture in the world of the interpreter. I argue that throughout the development of Christianity, it has been a challenge to appropriate biblical texts (especially narratives in the Old Testament) because of the social environment of Christians. A sentiment that I share with Cahill (2002:7 & 8) is that biblical interpretation plays an important role in using the Old Testament in Christian ethics. To this effect, Biblical Criticism can give moral and intellectual direction to society and possibly cast light on the culture portrayed in Genesis 38. The methods that are used in Biblical Criticism can inform current understanding of the text.

Based on the supposition that narrative can inform moral conduct, it is imperative to comprehend the customs and lifestyles of the people portrayed in these narratives. A conditional proposition to this is that a look at the book of Genesis alone is indicative that the worldview and values of the people that it depicts are recognisably different to those of contemporary Christians. Since this study is concerned with what function the relationship between ethics and culture has in people's moral way of thinking, a number of questions arise. For example: How does this connection influence current understanding on the Old Testament? What society does the text portray and in what society will it be interpreted? What persona and behaviour are in line with being part of one

or the other society? These are all important questions to consider when using a text in Christian ethics. It is my observation that the moral worth of Genesis 38 lies in how the narrative can inform Christian ethics. It could be argued that Biblical Criticism is a possible key to unlocking the results of this study. Finding meaning plays a central role in this study. It is therefore crucial to present the text in a way that conveys understanding of the ideas of the writer(s). Any suggestions or recommendations that are put forward are therefore done based on the findings from the literature.

#### **1.4 Methodology**

The aim of focusing on the literature is to describe some of the methods and theories of using narrative put forward by scholars in Biblical Criticism and Christian ethics. The various methods that are available in biblical studies can be beneficial in gaining a better understanding of the subject matter. Due to the constraints of research conducted at this level, it is not feasible to look at all the methods in the field; therefore a few relevant methods are used for the purpose of this study. In carrying out the task, specific procedures are used to describe the thought behaviour represented in texts from the Pentateuch.

The literature that is used for this study consists mainly of books and journals; information that has been obtained electronically is also used. This selection gives insight into current and classic debates on issues pertaining to not only the Old Testament and ethics but also the methods of interpretation that are helpful for the study of Genesis 38. The different approaches of interpretation that are used in this study are the historical-critical approach and the literary-critical approach. The aim is to see how both methods can be helpful in studying the story of Judah and Tamar. The focus therefore is on the book of Genesis. In this sense, both the historical-critical approach and the literary-critical approach can help to establish the social context of the book. With the historical-critical approach, the intention is to look at the contributions that

have been made within the historical tradition with regard to some of the concepts mentioned in the narrative (that is, the levirate law/duty and religion). The literary-critical approach is helpful to understand concepts in the texts, such as “trickery” or “deception”, which are a common occurrence in the patriarchal narratives. This approach seems more suitable as the idea of deception is better focused on within the framework of narrative art. Ultimately, these approaches improve one’s understanding of the narrative of Judah and Tamar and its applicability to ethical formation.

## **1.5 Chapter outline**

In chapter 1, in which the study is introduced, attention is drawn to the challenge of using the Old Testament as a source for moral formation. The purpose is to provide an explanation of the aim of the study in order to gain a clear understanding of the topic.

In the second chapter, the discussion shifts to Biblical Criticism and the methods developed by biblical scholars. The different methods can help one to get a complete overview of Genesis 38, which gives the study a solid foundation. A focus on Biblical Criticism is important in the discussion, as it later help in the examination and analysis of Genesis 38. The purpose is to assess the efficiency of the different methods that are used in Biblical Criticism in order to better understand the narrative (which is discussed in a subsequent chapter). This includes understanding the society in which Judah and Tamar lived. It is important to note that the study only concentrates on the methods that will enable the reader/interpreter to understand Genesis 38.

In chapter 3 the discussion moves on to Christian ethics. The focus on Christian ethics gives one an idea of the different ideas on using the Old Testament to inform Christian living. The chapter highlights the challenges that the early church faced within their society and how they attempted to deal

with these. The aim is to establish how Christianity developed and, more specifically, how this development influenced Christian ethics and the way in which we make sense of biblical texts today. This should indicate how the Old Testament was used for ethical formation in different periods of time. The sole intent is to uncover recent trends in Christian ethics of appropriating biblical narratives. The different methodologies used in Christian ethics are explained to see how relevant they are to the texts. Here the focus is on character and community. It is also important to take the feminist perspective into consideration. Feminist views can provide insight into gender issues in the text.

In chapter 4, the narrative of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38 is analysed. The meaning of the narrative is first looked at in terms of Biblical Criticism and then by using approaches that are followed in Christian ethics. The purpose is to determine how character and community can be shaped by the narrative.

Chapter 5 concludes the study. Here the overall results of the study are discussed, and recommendations and suggestions for further study are put forward.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE PLACE OF GENESIS IN BIBLICAL CRITICISM

#### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter the methods that have been developed in Biblical Criticism are used to explain the book of Genesis and the narratives of the patriarchs. In order to situate Genesis properly within the study, biblical scholars' explanations of the book are discussed. This is primarily a consideration of how feasible the different approaches are in studying a text from the Old Testament and it serves as a model to shed light on the events portrayed in the patriarchal narratives. This chapter is therefore an attempt to illustrate the key methods that are available for the study of the Old Testament and how these methods relate to biblical narratives. It emphasises the society in Genesis and concepts such as the levirate duty and trickery. In order to examine Genesis 38, a discussion or overview of Genesis and an understanding of its original purpose are crucial. Fundamental issues about the patriarchal narratives and their use are relevant if the details are to be used in the study.

The aim of using Biblical Criticism is to show how various approaches can be applied when using the Old Testament in Christian ethics. It is important to understand biblical texts and it can be argued that biblical scholars have given us an interpretive lens to look at and explain the meaning of the ancestral narratives. Biblical scholars give us many ways in which to understand the events depicted in biblical texts.

In this chapter, I firstly give an overview of the book of Genesis. Secondly, I look at different methods of interpreting the text in order to examine the customs and lifestyles portrayed in the patriarchal narratives. Finally, some of the challenges encountered in such a study are discussed.

## 2.2 Overview of the book of Genesis

Given that one of the aims of the study is to explore some of the problems one might experience when examining Genesis 38, it is important to look at the book of Genesis as a whole. This is necessary to gain insight into the story of Judah and Tamar. Scholars are somewhat divided about the origin of the book of Genesis. Although they do not have clarity on the exact date when the book was written, there is consensus that it originated during the Persian period from 539 to 334 BCE (Whybray 2001:38–40).

An important element of Genesis seems to be the promise of land. In this regard, Brueggemann (1982:307–309) points out that in terms of theology, God is the supreme ruler who takes this promise seriously. Consequently, Israel – as the receiver of the promise – has to be obedient. It is important to note that the idea of acquiring land stems from the Babylonian exile in the sixth century BCE or the period when the Israelites lived in the surrounding areas of Jerusalem. The authorship of the book is not known (Sailhamer 1994:1 & 2), but the events portrayed in the narratives are considered to be prehistoric (Niditch 2012:27–30). It can be argued that the narratives were first narrated orally and only later written down (Niditch 2012:32 & 33). The narratives demonstrate how the patriarchs may have lived. It confirms that matters pertaining to the household, family and children were important (Niditch 2012:28–30). Consequently the narratives often deal with issues experienced within the family and with the behaviour of members of the society. At this stage, it is important to note that if the narratives suggest ideas about a possible history, heritage, values, beliefs and the customs of the patriarchs, the Old Testament can be used in Christian ethics.

As the first book of the Bible, Genesis is made up of two segments, namely primeval history and the patriarchal narratives (Collins 2004:47–65). Primeval history refers to the beginning or the creation of the world: humanity is



explained in Genesis 1 to 11 and Genesis 12 to 50 is a detailed account of the patriarchs. These narratives focus on certain individuals who were chosen by God and who later had families who became Israel, the people of God. Genesis 38 falls within these narratives, although the reason for its placement between these narratives is unclear.

### **2.3 The inclusion of the narrative of Judah and Tamar in the Joseph narrative**

Scholars struggle to explain the inclusion of a story that is about the family of Judah within the larger narrative about Joseph (Clifford 2012:213). The narrative may have been inserted in the Joseph narrative because both deal with the sons of Jacob. Furthermore, chapter 38 causes some kind of delay – which allows the reader to sense the passing of time when Joseph was taken to Egypt (Eveson 2001:475 & 476). However, although some people argue that the narrative is a deviation from the Joseph narrative, others point out that it is also aimed at portraying the transformation of Judah. This connection is made based on the assumption that Judah developed as a person. While Judah previously sold Joseph into slavery, in Genesis 43:3–10 and 44:14–34 he is a changed man who promises to protect his younger brother (Brodie 2001:351).

Nevertheless, it can be argued that in chapter 37, Jacob is still a young man; whereas in chapter 46 he is older and takes his relatives to Egypt. In chapter 46, Jacob takes the sons of Tamar to Egypt as part of his family. This might explain the placement of the account of Judah and Tamar in chapter 38 (Ross 1988:611). Therefore, Genesis 38 addresses the problem of chronology. If the story was placed elsewhere, it may have caused some difficulty in structuring the patriarchal narratives. It thus seems that Genesis 38 was included in the book of Genesis because it forms part of a genealogical tale (Collins 2004:100). It would appear that the material describes the strange lineage of

David, who was a descendent of Judah (Collins 2004:101). Hence it could be argued that the narrative is included in Genesis because it informs the reader about events that happened in an earlier period as it is remembered by the storyteller from the early history of the tribe (Hanson 2001:47 & 48). Another point to note is that the element of trickery in the story has led to arguments that link the narrative with other tales of trickery in the book of Genesis. Incidentally, the narrative of the daughters of Lot in Genesis 19:30–38 is regarded as one of these tales as it contains a form of deception (Wickes 2008:45).

## **2.4 A diachronic or synchronic approach to biblical texts**

In considering the various ways to make sense of biblical texts, it is clear that scholars explain the narratives in the Pentateuch in different ways. At the moment, a wide range of methods is used to study the Old Testament (Barton 1996:1). Each of these has a particular purpose that can be useful in interpretation. Barton (1996:2) argues that the different methods used in biblical studies should be used to “draw a logical map of Biblical Criticism on which the various methods can be located”. This should help the reader to comprehend not only the reason for which methods have objective reality but also why they are used. To this effect, it is important to look at some of the methods and how they can serve to improve one’s understanding of a text. Here a diachronic and synchronic focus on the book of Genesis may be helpful as it emphasises the various characteristics of the book that are important for understanding it (Carr 1996:5 & 6).

Of considerable significance is to note the dissimilar value of the diachronic approach and the synchronic approach. The diachronic approach looks at a biblical text as it developed through time, while the synchronic approach concentrates on it as it existed at a certain point in time (Ska 2012:3–6). A synchronic interpretation is limited to the reception of the text, with a focus on

the reader. Quite the opposite, the diachronic interpretation is restricted to the production of the text and thus the text is principal (Van Wolde 1997:1). In the diachronic approach, the way in which the author or editor used other texts in the writing process is considered. The Pentateuch has mainly been studied as history to refer to other studies that have used it to construct the history of Israel or to focus on the development of the Pentateuch over time.

In this study, history refers to the development of the various interpretations of the Pentateuch. In other words, the focus is on the research history of the Pentateuch. Originally, the account given in Genesis was considered to be the history of Israel and although views have changed since then (Bishop & Kelle 2011:72), a look at how this line of thought developed proves relevant. The historical approach can be justified in that scholars tried to gain a better understanding of the context within which these texts originated, although the biblical narratives should not be considered as the account of the history of Israel – or, in this case, the patriarchs. However, in order to establish the place of the patriarchs, the Old Testament can be helpful if the texts are re-used to inform present Christian communities (Gottwald 1993:17).

A historical stance can make it easier to understand the moral outlook in biblical texts and the ethical values of the people of Israel. In this sense, the Old Testament becomes a means to examine not only the customs and family structure of Israel, but also the way in which they understood their world (Wenham 2006:5 & 6). This then gives one an idea about the customs of Israel as presented within the biblical texts. In contrast, the literary approach can improve one's understanding of a text in terms of language, structure and genre when one reads the text narrowly to identify ethical matters (Davies 2006:732–753). It also helps one to read the narratives as if they were creative writing in that it enables one to conceptualise ethical issues within the text, re-evaluate one's own beliefs and reassesses one's own moral values in view of it. Here the use of different methods can be beneficial as all the

methods complement each other, which can help with the various steps a person has to take to understand the text (Barton 1996:5).

In the following sections the aim is to focus on some of the categories of historical criticism and the ways in which biblical scholars have tried to understand the Old Testament. Over the years, biblical scholars have improved the way in which people identify with biblical texts by developing refined techniques to help us understand the texts better (Barton 1996:19). The sole purpose of the various methods is to help us make sense of the biblical texts. Even though each method is unique in terms of interpretation, the problem is to find a balance between the methods. It is difficult to find an even distribution that can ensure some form of stability in making sense of the texts. It is with this in mind that the focus of this study now shifts to some of the methods used in biblical studies. I will not only look at diachronic or historical methods, but also at narrative criticism as the most important synchronic method to study biblical narratives.

## **2.5 The historical context**

Those who use the historical approach to texts have contributed to the study of the Pentateuch by explaining the Old Testament texts. However, even though the material was studied as history, it does not necessarily record the historical events of Israel (Thiselton 2009:20–27). The focus is instead on the purpose of the writers as the foundation for finding the meaning of the texts. Here it is important to focus on the different texts in terms of the place and time in which the narrative is presented as happening (Klingbeil 2003:401).

Historical critics focus on features such as authorship, date and content of composition, sources and traditions, and genre to determine whether the material has historical value (Rogerson 2001:9–11). Other important characteristics are language and style (Matthews & Moyer 1997:26–28). In

this way, it is ascertained that the texts were written for a particular audience at a particular time and in a particular place. Thus it is imperative to establish who the authors and readers of the texts were. Source criticism has been used in an effort to try to allocate dates to texts in order to determine their origin (Hanson 2001:44 & 45). The focus has shifted to the different periods in which the texts were preserved and which resulted in their continuance (Barton 1998b:9–19). Some critics argue that through genre, authors tried to narrate past events in order to explain the present. For this reason, the information is not regarded as an account of actual events but more as a combination of myth and legend, with little historical material. In describing the Pentateuch, scholars who used source criticism viewed the chronological periods that had led to the development of the texts as being consistent as they argued that texts were created from longer passages credited to different sources (Campbell 2001:3). The validity of the historicity of the patriarchal narratives has, however, been questioned. It seems as if the historical era was developed later from the customs and lifestyle of Israel (Collins 2004:100–105). A primary concern is how the material can be appropriated for the present Christian community. But in order to determine what biblical texts can mean now, it is important to establish what it could have meant then.

### ***2.5.1 The documentary hypothesis***

At first, the narratives in the Pentateuch were grouped according to various sources which focused on the religious practices of Israel (Barton 1996:30–33). Wellhausen grouped biblical texts in terms of different sources based on the periods within which they presumably originated; this became known as the documentary hypothesis (Viviano 2007:154 & 155; Finkelstein 2007:41; Ceresko 1992:52; Klingbeil 2003:401). The sources were regarded as being in a certain order (Campbell 2001:3). As a result, he came up with the J (Yahweh) source in the ninth century, the E (Elohist) source in the eighth

century, the D (Deuteronomy) source in the seventh century and the P (Priestly) source in the sixth or fifth century.

For the purpose of this study, I concentrate on how Collins explains the documentary hypothesis. The P source portrays history as a cycle of covenants with a focus on Noah, Abraham and Moses (Collins 2004:57). Unlike the J source, it does not focus on angels or dreams but its dating is unclear. The D source is found in Deuteronomy and its central theme is the covenant (Collins 2004:57). The J and E sources are not easily identifiable because of their narrative basis. The main concept in these two sources is issues of guilt and innocence, although in the J source God is somewhat anthropomorphic.

The theory of Wellhausen was further developed by scholars such as Gerhard von Rad, Rolf Rendtorff and Erhard Blum. Von Rad associated the J source with the sovereignty of Solomon, given that it was older than what Wellhausen had pointed out (Collins 2004:58–64). Rendtorff and Blum had reservations about the time of the composition of the Pentateuchal narratives. They took issue with whether the narratives could be assigned to the Deuteronomist editors prior to the Babylonian exile. Some scholars associated the J source with the stories in Genesis, Exodus and Numbers because these books emphasise the notion of promise and fulfilment (Devega 2007:154 & 155). When the other sources are considered, it is clear that in the E source the name “Elohim” is used for God and source D can be identified with law codes and a focus on the theology of obeying the law (Ceresko 1992:52–65). The P source shows an interest not only in the priesthood, sect and ceremonies but also in the law (King 2009:3–10). A focus on the sources dominated Pentateuchal thinking for nearly a century, but recent thinking started to question its relevance and validity (Viviano 2007:154 & 155). Certain discrepancies regarding the dating of the sources have caused uncertainty.

This has led to some claims that the P and non-P sources were the only sources. Carr (1996:7–11) asserts that one can only establish the P and non-P sources within the Pentateuch. Also, in the development of Genesis, the P source stands as a later source based on and attempting to stand against and replace the non-P source. Furthermore, he argues that redactors were responsible for the text as it stands now in that material from the P and non-P sources were combined in order to maintain the text in its original state. What is more, Priestly texts tend to appear as modelled on non-P texts and they often play an important role in relation to their non-P contexts. He therefore came to the conclusion that the P source was never an independent source but was, to a certain extent, a Priestly redaction like the Deuteronomistic redaction of Deuteronomy through 2 Kings. Currently two models can be pointed out as a source model and a redaction model. To explain: a source model refers to Priestly material that one can understand as having existed previously as separate from its present context; whereas a redaction model refers to a Priestly layer that was written as an extension of its non-Priestly context that never existed apart from it (Carr 1996:43–45). P material is designed to correct non-P material.

### ***2.5.2 The life setting of Israel***

After focusing on the sources to get an idea of the religious practices of Israel, scholars moved to studying the material in its social setting. The purpose of form criticism was to create a tool to study the life of Israel (Barton 1996:30–33). New developments formed within historical criticism when scholars moved from a historical stance to the study of the social life of Israel. Herman Gunkel (1862–1932) developed the theory of Wellhausen by focusing on the life setting in which the texts were written (Hayes 1979:121–154). For Gunkel, Genesis was a collected work (Ska 2012:3–5). He pointed out that the material was transmitted orally, thus it is more legend and not historical. For this reason, it comprises various tales and legends but does not form part of a

literary genre. He also argued that the narratives were transmitted orally and was only later written down as texts were woven together. Legend focuses more on personal and private matters, thus the move shifted from what happened behind the text to the story itself and its life setting (Collins 2004:84 & 85). The focus was to determine forms not only to discover history before writing existed within the society and culture, but also to uncover the life situation and function in trying to make sense of biblical texts (Taylor 2003:336). Questions about the life situation became substantial.

The German term “*Sitz im Leben*” is well known within form criticism. People have different life settings which give rise to distinctive forms of literature (Klingbeil 2003:405). In form criticism, social settings are portrayed in different forms that can be pointed out as legends, hymns and laments (Soulén & Soulén 2001:61–64). From source criticism, debates started to arise about whether the book of Genesis has sources that are far removed from each other which led to the earliest pieces being composed later. These discussions centred on whether actual authors were involved or whether the texts were redactions considered as hints of various copies. In this case, the setting of the story is established by genre and literary structure and therefore the complete and restored text is the focus. Gunkel attempted to point out individual units of tradition in order to properly identify a genre that could then be related to a historical situation (Sparks 2007:111–114). A problem with form criticism is that in comparison to the historical approach, form criticism lacks historical confidence (Whitelam 2006:255–260).

The historical-critical approach has dominated biblical studies for a long time. Its proponents have made a tremendous contribution in helping us to comprehend biblical texts. Through source criticism, scholars have gained an understanding of the different sources that may have been involved in the writing of the texts. Form critics pointed out that texts may have had different life settings before it came to be as Christians currently read texts in the Bible.



However, narrative criticism is a new advancement in biblical studies that has its foundation in forms of literature that were previously studied. It developed from some disillusionment with historical criticism in the second half of the twentieth century (Amit 2001:9). Powell (1990:1 & 2) argues that literary criticism is a ground-breaking resource for reading the Bible. This sudden appeal to literature can be better explained in terms of recent developments.

## **2.6 Narrative criticism**

In terms of narrative, scholars began to examine the literary techniques used by the writers of biblical narratives. Amit (2001:11) traces the origins of narrative criticism to Hermann Gunkel. He points out that Gunkel called for a focus on the artistic features of the narratives in the book of Genesis, but was limited to the introduction of his commentary on Genesis. It was his students who later focused on examining literary forms by categorising narratives into subdivisions of a group in search of similar features of form that would enable them to classify them. Narrative criticism focuses on the genre that the writers and redactors of biblical texts used, which became central to the historical approach. Literary criticism focuses on the text in its final form and what the text can mean to the reader. Consequently, literary features such as structure, genre and theme are important to consider when reading a text.

Other features (such as theme, plot, characters and setting) can also be a focus within the narrative (Miscall 1998:539–541). The plot can indicate the scheme of events in the narrative. This usually has an outline and a time structure. The function of the plot is to steer the reader towards certain features that are important to understand the narrative (Amit 2009:223–225). The setting gives the reader an idea of the surroundings and the place of the events that occur in the narrative. An important element is that within narrative, there is always a storyteller who has a comprehensive idea of the characters in the narrative and who even seems to know the mind of God

(Amit 2009:223–225). Narrative criticism is helpful in that it enables one to look at the narrative that is told, the events that occur and the setting within which it occurs, as well as the characters in the narrative (Soulen & Soulen 2001:119 & 120).

The narrative features of a text are pivotal, as opposed to the context in which it originates (Rhoads 2009:222 & 223). A question that should be posed here is: How can this interpretation be helpful in understanding biblical texts? While the historical approach is mainly used to look at the historical context of the text, the literary approach is used to look at the function of the text – with the reader as the determinant factor in giving meaning to the text. But what is the role of the reader? According to Amit (2001:14), the reader determines the boundaries of the narrative. In clarifying this, he draws attention to the fact that the reader has the responsibility to establish the beginning and the end of the narrative. His argument is based on the idea that one chapter may contain various narratives, particularly in view of the fact that a narrative might go beyond the boundary of a chapter. However, although narratives may have certain boundaries, these are not formal and therefore the reader has the choice to agree or disagree with the events that occur. He further argues that it is essential to take boundaries into consideration, the reason being that “a given unit may be regarded as a whole unit in relation to the scenes that comprise it and as a part of the whole play” (Amit 2001:15).

The question is whether the reader or interpreter may decide to focus on a specific scene or a whole act as the purpose of his or her research. It could be argued that unit boundaries are relevant for the study of biblical narratives because the current reader may not know what limitations the authors or editors may have had in mind (Amit 2001:16). The narrative about Joseph in Genesis 37, which continues to the end of the book at chapter 50, is a good example of boundaries. The interpreter can choose to concentrate on the whole narrative or a particular unit within it. For example: The Joseph

narrative comprises various chapters. Chapter 39 can be pointed out (which is the encounter of Joseph with the wife of Potiphar) and also chapter 40 (which depicts the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker). The reader or interpreter therefore has to decide on the limitations of the chosen narrative unit. The question is how such a theory can be applied to the patriarchal narratives. Amit (2001:16) argues that when reading biblical narratives, the reader or interpreter must set the limitations.

Thus far in this study, different methods of interpreting biblical texts have been discussed from different angles. Firstly, the focus was on the author, composition and dating of the texts. Secondly, the method with the reader as the point of departure was discussed. In the next section, the social world of biblical texts is discussed as another way to explain the texts.

## **2.7 The social world of the Bible**

Models and theories from sociology and anthropology have been used to determine the social world of the Bible (Whitelam 1998:35–38). The purpose of this approach is to try to uncover the social setting of Israel. One of the appealing factors of the social sciences is that scholars attempt to recover various aspects of society that are not mentioned within biblical texts but that form an integral part of the social world from which the text emerged (Whitelam 1998:38–41). A study of the social world of the Bible is interesting because it helps us to understand some of the essential ideas in the text, for example the concepts of family, marriage and religion. Scholars have also used interdisciplinary approaches to discover what meaning the texts had for the original audience in order to direct current use of the texts by faith communities. In this sense, understanding the theological significance of the text is connected to understanding the social setting within which these texts originated. Therefore, many scholars choose to show the difference between the historical re-enactment and theological interpretation of the Old

Testament, which is also why the social sciences seem appealing (Whitelam 1998:38–41).

Therefore, the main focus here is to try to recover the different aspects of society that are not mentioned in the texts but which formed an integral part of the social world from which the texts emerged. This is helpful in that one gains clarity on essential concepts in the text. However, this method also has its problems as some scholars question whether contemporary models are suitable to use for studying ancient Israel (Whitelam 1998:45 & 46). It may also be difficult to establish the relation between the text and the social context in that it is difficult to date the material.

Whitelam (1998:38–41) warns that one should be careful when you use sociological structures to define culture. It may therefore be beneficial to consider what culture means in sociology. How does sociology define culture? Culture can either be seen as a communal standard of living for the members of a society or it can refer to that which informs people about the way a certain group of people live (Grelle 2005:129). In sociology, culture can be described as that which directs people toward careful thought about certain symbols within human society (Jenks 1993:8 & 9; Neubeck & Glasberg 2005:111). Culture can be described as that which differentiates human behaviour from the behaviour of other peoples. Therefore culture refers to the ideas, customs and behaviour of a particular people or society. Sociologists have identified certain societal structures within a society that embody culture. For the purpose of this study, I only consider the structure of family and the religion of Israel in the patriarchal narratives.

The family plays an important role in the reproduction and continuation of society (Neubeck & Glasberg 2005:159). This structure is also essential to create a pattern for relationships in society; the different roles within the family lead to the perpetuation of social bonds. The family structure also serves as a

representative category for marriage. Families usually connect to form communities and the community later becomes the social setting for daily activities (that is, economic, religious and leisure activities). Within society, certain behavioural patterns are developed to control how people relate to each other. These are called norms. Norms form an integral part of society because any infringement may cause a menace to the ability of the group to function properly within society. Laws are norms that are more official. Laws are often considered pivotal as they are legal codes which members of society have to obey (Neubeck & Glasberg 2005:115). Religious organisations may, however, adopt certain attitudes that are inconsistent with the majority's cultural practices (Neubeck & Glasberg 2005:154–156). Religious principles give a particular social identity based on conformity.

The study of culture includes diverse fields such as anthropology, history, literary studies, and human geography and sociology (Bagnall, Smith, Crawford, Baldwin, & Ogborn, 2008:1). Thus the concept of culture has a wide range. Culture can also be defined as the artistic development of a certain way of life and various symbols can be identified in a culture (Bagnall et al 2008:2). These can be connected to a people, a period or a group of people. However, only human beings are capable of creating and communicating culture because they have the ability to create and use symbols (Bagnall et al 2008:2). A symbol can be defined as “some word or drawing or gesture that will stand for either an idea or an object, or a feeling” (Bagnall et al 2008:2). Through symbols, people convey consensus about certain ideas. For this reason, it may be a problem to use sociological methods to describe culture in the Bible. Throughout this study, I focus on the various ways in which scholars have tried to make sense of biblical texts. Because the Bible is a book of plurality, it is difficult to determine shared ideas on words or gestures, and more importantly life. This makes it difficult to study culture in Israel. Another problem is that scholars are uncertain about whether some of the figures that are captured in the Bible actually lived.

Interpreting meaning is important in cultural studies because it helps us to gain knowledge of the connection between the past and present (Bagnall et al 2008:4). Hence in the following subsections I focus on the way Israel as a people continued in different generations and the way they experienced life. Family, community and religion played an integral part in ancient Israel. It is important to mention that the concept of culture is used rather vigilantly because the social structure of Israel underwent a number of changes over an extensive period of time (Niditch 2012:27–35). Therefore, the term culture is approached with caution in order not to generalise about Israelite culture. Furthermore, the continuous change in biblical material makes it difficult to determine how the attitudes of the Israelites have been changed in numerous biblical texts. Nevertheless, I shall attempt to construct a possible idea of the culture and society of the patriarchs by using the methods that scholars have used to interpret the material. For the purpose of this study, I make use of both a historical-critical approach and a literary-critical approach to interpret the stories of the patriarchs and construct a possible social setting for Genesis 38. This is especially useful for the later discussion of the story of Judah and Tamar.

### ***2.7.1 The patriarchs of Israel***

It is important to concentrate on the patriarchal narratives since chapter 38 is situated between Genesis 12 and 50. Moreover, since there is uncertainty about the inclusion of the chapter in the book of Genesis, a focus on the context of the book may be helpful to understand the narrative. These chapters contain the narratives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, who are purported to be the forefathers of Israel. The narratives do not only give an account of these characters but also informs us whether their development was good or bad. The narratives commences in Genesis 12 when Abraham is called, blessed in Haran, and is promised offspring and land – which leads

him to build an altar to the Lord (Genesis 12:7). Numerous events follow but ultimately these led to a covenant relationship between Abraham and God (in Genesis 15). It is imperative to mention that the covenant relationship is an important feature of the will of God towards Israel, who becomes a people in the exodus event (Collins 2004:65). The continuous development of the patriarchal figures led to a family becoming a nation (Ska 2006:16–19). If the narratives in Genesis are considered, Israel began with Abraham and Sarah. As the first patriarch, Abraham was called to bring forth a multitude of descendants (Rogerson 2001:29-41). Fundamentally, the narratives give the reader an idea of the kind of people the patriarchs were and the role they played within their families. They are portrayed as both good and bad, with the common occurrence of deception as a key factor in the way that they excelled within their society.

As the narratives develop, the understanding of what is connoted as family in Israel becomes clear. A closer look at the concept of family reveals that it formed an integral part of the people of Israel. King and Stager (2001:36-40) argue that in the Old Testament narrative, the term “family” is developed and used for social entities such as tribes, people and nations. Israel was a society where authority was considered in terms of the family. The concept of family within Israel was patriarchal and hierarchical (Greengus 2011:11–20). The father was the central figure and had authority over his household, which included that as the husband he had authority over his wife.

Gerstenberger (2002:30) argues that the relationships and structures of the ancient Near Eastern family ensured support for and the perpetuation of the group. He points out that members of the group were protected by divinities. It is important to note that families did not have written laws and therefore lacked any authority to appeal to. However, cases of conflict in the family had to be resolved. It seems that all the adult persons in the family were equally important for the continuation of the group. It could be argued that the

superiority of parents is an essential feature of the Old Testament. In view of this, emphasising the authority of the husband does not hold much ground as it would appear that patriarchy occurred only later within the society (Gerstenberger 2002:31). It would also appear that the wife was mainly confined to the household, whereas the husband acted as the representative of the family. Customs were taken seriously and therefore every family member had to adhere to them; weaker members could petition customs.

Nevertheless, women did not enjoy the full rights accorded to men (Wildavsky 1994:37–48). In some cases, the narratives depict women as being treated unjustly. As can be seen in the story of Judah and Tamar, some biblical women were forced to act in opposition to the customs and laws to obtain justice<sup>1</sup>. The participation of women is barely recorded in the biblical narratives, unless the circumstances were extraordinary as in the case of Tamar who gained justice in an obscure manner. The wife was mostly confined to household matters, while all public and family matters were the responsibility of the husband (Gerstenberger 2002:19–24). Therefore, the husband also acted as the public representative for the family.

Family, as presented in the Old Testament, focused more on the extended family and clans were formed out of these family lineages (Matthews 2005:520–530). The function of the family can be considered as mainly creating identity in that it served to protect the family members from people outside the group and conveyed status to the members. The family and household provided the central point in relation to leaders and the God of Israel; thus loyalty and trustworthiness were important features. Religion

---

<sup>1</sup> In explaining justice or righteousness, the term “*sedeq*” or “*sedaqah*” is purely legalistic. This is the most common translation but it can also refer to vindication, deliverance, uprightness, right and prosperity (Birch 1991:153). In the Old Testament, righteousness is not actions in accordance with an ethical, legal or religious norm. Righteousness is not the same as giving a person what is due to them. Some argue that righteousness in the Old Testament can be framed as one of the qualities of Israel’s covenant callings (Birch 1991:154). It could therefore be argued that Judah was called to show loyalty to the covenant relationship, which calls for more than obeying the law.



therefore also played an important role in Israelite society. The people existed as a theocracy in which the family and tribe played important roles (Finney 2006:711 & 712).

### **2.7.2 *The religion of the patriarchs***

As the people of God, religion played an integral part in Israelite life. Being aware that the biblical texts may not give adequate insight into the actual society of the patriarchs, the trouble one faces is that the book of Genesis does not give a concise description of the religion of the patriarchs. Religion comprises a number of factors. It can be classified as the lifestyle of a people that corresponds with their practices, outlook on life, beliefs and values (Moberly 1992:79–85). It is imperative, therefore, to contemplate where the religion of Israel began and how it developed. Even more important to consider is what was the religion behind the book of Genesis? Surely there is an ideology behind the religious rituals, but to establish this poses a problem.

The burning question is how the connection between God and Israel ensured structure within this community (Miller 2000:142–150). Abraham was called and blessed with the promise of many descendants who would inherit land. Isaac (Genesis 26:24) and Jacob (Genesis 28:13) also adopted the God of Abraham (Collins 2004:83). Consequently, God was not restricted to a particular position or location, but went with the ancestors wherever they went. It is also important to point out that the God whom the patriarchs worshipped was known as Yahweh, to whom the patriarchs built altars in different places.

The religion of Israel impacted almost every sphere of their society and being the people of God meant that Israel had to behave in a certain way. The people of Israel worshipped the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Knauth 2005:514–520). Upholding the law was important in Israel. Therefore, the idea of the law played a crucial role in Israelite society. Religion was the key factor

in ensuring the identity, dignity and well-being of the person, on condition that moral codes and customs were adhered to. This was to ensure that the welfare of the people was a priority.

### **2.7.3 *Morality in terms of cultural practices***

Israelite society had certain duties and responsibilities that a person who belonged to the community had to comply with. The law in the Old Testament has a wide scope. Custom and law played an important role in the life of the Israelite and it can be described in terms of the extended family as it was the responsibility of the family to ensure justice (Matthews 2005:520). Moreover, family law can be regarded as a subcategory of customary law. Law plays an important role in the story of Judah and Tamar, which makes a discussion on the subject important. In this regard, law refers to the divine will of God (Alt 1989:81).

In Deuteronomy Moses gave the law in oral form (as a speech) to the people of Israel. Most biblical material on the law has various stages and tendencies in development. The law in the Pentateuch is evident as a collection of books (Exodus, Deuteronomy and Leviticus). This study is based upon the law as implemented by the family (Knauth 2005:520). In effect, the law is considered as the officially permitted rulings and moral restrictions in the Pentateuch that were administered by the family (Wenham 2006:351). In this study, I look at the levirate law, how it controlled the functioning of the family in biblical times and the reason why fulfilling this duty was important. I do this by briefly looking at the principles of the law in the Old Testament. Israel was a covenant people who pledged to be loyal to God (Ex 19:4–6) and for this reason, the law was central in their relationship with YHWH (Wenham 2006:351). If they did not adhere to the law, there would be punishment. The relationship between the law and ethics was to control and oversee the rules in order to represent the ethical standard of the person who drafted it.

Thus, to ensure that family matters were run according to the will of God, laws were implemented. However, and as indicated in Deuteronomy 25:5–10, the courts had no jurisdiction over legal matters concerning the family (Phillips 2002:111–126). The system was governed by the people to ensure that actions stemmed from honour and would not lead to shame in the community. Israel had to fulfil the law (Matthews 2005:520) or be punished by God. In the biblical narratives, communities evaluate their experience of God by constantly weighing up their traditions (Birch 1991:29). These urge attention to every level of witness preserved within the text, as well as attention to the final form as the ultimate shape given to the text by the biblical communities. Moreover, a focus on the levirate responsibility is important in this discussion.

#### **2.7.4 *The levirate law***

Before explaining the levirate law, it is important to briefly look at marriage in Israel. Marriage referred not only to the union of a man and a woman, but also to the union of two households (Gravett, Bohmbach, Greifenhagen & Polaski 2008:95 & 96). It served to establish descent in Israel, which means that its main purpose was to elongate the family line. It also had an economic function in that it ensured the transmission of property and determined inheritance rights (Steinberg 1993:5 & 6). With regard to customs, it served the divine criterion to which every member of the family had to adhere – although the weaker person at the time could appeal to it (Gerstenberger 2002:30 & 31).

Marriage thus had a number of functions in the Old Testament. It served as a premise for social connections, to reinforce control over property and to ensure economic growth for the families involved (Matthews 2005:520–521). Considering this, the levirate marriage refers to the duty of a brother-in-law towards his deceased brother's wife (Alter 1996:217–223). Here the closest surviving brother becomes a replacement of the dead one in that he had to

provide the widow of his brother with an heir. If a man therefore died childless, his brother (or any close relative) had the responsibility to provide his widow with a child. Levirate marriage has its origin from the Latin “*levir*”, which refers to a brother-in-law (Gravett et al 2008:95 & 96). A full description of the custom is found in Deuteronomy 25:5–10<sup>2</sup>. The origin of the levirate practice is not clear, but it was not distinctive to Israel (which will not be discussed in this study). Levirate custom is found in many cultures in the Ancient Near East (Davidson 1979:226–230). There are three references to the custom in the Bible, namely in Genesis 38, Deuteronomy 25:5–10 and the story of Ruth (Davies 1981a:138 & 139).

Scholars have diverse opinions about what the actual purpose of the levirate duty was. Some argue that it was to provide the widow with offspring (Wenham 1994:366–368; Alter 1996:217–223; Frymer-Kensky 2000:161–163), while others argue that it was to carry on the name of the deceased husband (Davies 1981a:140–144). In finding a middle ground, it can be argued that both arguments are too narrow as the intent was to provide the widow with an heir who could carry on the name of the deceased but also give protection to the widow (Davidson 1979:230). This law also ensured that the woman remained within the family and retained a heritage within the family (Roop 1987:248–254).

---

<sup>2</sup> *The King James Bible*, Deuteronomy 25:5–10: “If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband’s brother shall go unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of a husband’s brother unto her. And it shall be that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel. And if the man like not to take his brother’s wife, then let his brother’s wife go up to the gate unto the elders, and say, My husband’s brother refuseth to raise up unto his brother a name of Israel, he will not perform the duty of my husband’s brother. Then the elders of his city shall call him, and speak unto him: and if he stand to it, and say I like not to take her; Then shall his brother’s wife come unto him in the presence of the elders, and loose his shoe from off his foot, and spit in his face, and shall answer and say, So shall it be done unto that man that will not build up his brother’s house. And his name shall be called in Israel, the house of him that hath his shoe loosed.”

According to the levirate law, the son born from the one who was fulfilling the duty became the legal child and heir of the deceased man and had a right to his property and name. The widow was given financial safety. Also, having a son gave her social status, from which she was deprived because of her widowhood. It also gave her protection within the community. Three purposes are identified here, which are (1) to continue the name of the clan, (2) to inherit land and (3) to ensure that the widow was provided for (Matlock 2007:295). Some men were not keen to perform this duty (Weisberg 2004:403), which is evident in that both Onan and Judah tried to avoid the issue (although for different reasons).

The fulfilment of the levirate duty does not appear to have been obligatory, according to the narratives of Tamar and Ruth as well as the account given in Deuteronomy (Wenham 1994: 366 & 367; Manor 1984:134 & 135). The only punishment mentioned for the one who refused to uphold the law was public disgrace for him and his family (Phillips 2002:111–126). There seems to be a difference in the idea of levirate duty as mentioned in the narrative of Judah and Tamar and that captured in Deuteronomy (Manor 1984:135). Judah imposes the duty in Genesis 38 but in Deuteronomy 25:5–10 the brother-in-law can decide whether or not he wants to perform the duty. Although Deuteronomy acknowledges the law as customary, it cannot be imposed by the court (Phillips 2002:111–126). However, in the case where the brother in law neglected to fulfil the duty, the widow could bring him before the court, where they could try to persuade him to fulfil the duty. If he still refused to fulfil the duty, the woman could publicly humiliate him by taking one of his shoes and spitting in his face (Deut 25:8).

The levirate law is presented differently in Genesis 38 than in Deuteronomy 25:10 (Matlock 2007:295–310; Weisberg 2004:407–409). Judah had a moral obligation towards Tamar to treat her fairly in terms of custom (Davidson 1979:226–230). As will be seen in a later chapter, both Judah and Tamar

acted contrary to custom and the law but in the end justice was obtained. An important factor to consider is that their actions reflect what is known in Old Testament narrative as trickery that was acceptable.

## 2.8 Trickery and deception

Trickery (also called deception) is a common occurrence in the patriarchal narratives. To trick or deceive someone means to deliberately mislead or misrepresent the truth. A trickster<sup>3</sup> can be defined as a cunning person who acts in a skilful manner to outwit someone. Scholars have developed a number of theories regarding the concept of trickery in an effort to determine how it functioned within Israelite society. Trickery is not distinctive to Israelite folklore because it can also be found in other cultures in the ancient Near East (Jackson 2002:31 & 32).

For the most part, it seems as if trickery was a means of survival. However, in Genesis it seems that trickery served as a means to accomplish the legitimate rights and destiny of a person (Dershowitz 2000:174–177). In Genesis 12 and 20:1–13, Abraham deceived the Pharaoh by pretending that Sarah was his sister instead of his wife. Isaac also deceived (in Gen 26:12) by telling the men in Gerar that his wife was his sister. However, Jacob is considered the ultimate trickster – as can be seen in stories about him that are loaded with deception, such as in Genesis 25:29–34, Genesis 27:5–29, Genesis 30:35–43, Genesis 29:22–28 and Genesis 32:24–31. Together with his mother, Jacob deceived his father Isaac to gain the birth right of his brother Esau in Genesis 27. He also tricked his father by stealing the blessing of his brother.

---

<sup>3</sup> Jackson (2002:29–46) defines a trickster as a person who changes a situation by means of trickery. Most tricksters in the Bible are female and have a low social standing. As a means of confirming the argument, the stance of Niditch is taken, who identified four important points of trickery. These are: (1) the problem, which is the low status; (2) the execution or the plan that is put into action; (3) the compilation or deception that is brought to the fore; and (4) the outcome, where the status of the hero is reduced but he lives to tell the tale. The focus is also on the theory of Engar, who pointed out that the female trickster had a better understanding of the family and Israelite society. Therefore, the trickster also had greater knowledge of God and God's purpose for the community.

Trickery occurs within a number of these narratives. It also surfaces in the narrative of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38, with Judah and his sons tricking Tamar out of an heir; however, in retaliation, she also deceives Judah. It is important to consider how trickery functioned within the narratives in Genesis.

Anderson (2011:48) considers whether there is a link between the ancestral promise and trickery. He writes that deception helps to fulfil the promise. In some of the narratives in Genesis, there is tension between people; they deceive and are in conflict to some extent. Characters are therefore motivated by their own agendas, which make them disrespectable in character. Their motives and behaviour are portrayed as self-seeking (Anderson 2011:48 & 49). Consequently, Anderson argues that trickery can be considered as the fulfilment of the divine plan. In his view, “just as the trickster oracle reaches fulfilment through deception ... so also the ancestral promise continues toward fulfilment through deception” (Anderson 2011:129). Zakovitch (2010:100–101) argues that in Genesis 27, there is a tension between the justification of the actions of Jacob and the arguments to condemn his behaviour. There are thus two forces at work in the Jacob cycle, namely Jacob the man of justice and Jacob the deceiver. Furthermore, he presupposes that these portray the theological nature of texts as they reflect the place of God in trickery.

Moreover, trickery is regarded as a model which the biblical writers used in the narratives (Niditch 2012:27). In Genesis, the Israelites who resorted to trickery were normally those in foreign countries, young male heirs and women. Therefore, a trickster (as presented in the book of Genesis) is a person of low standards who attained success contrary to a rule. In Genesis 12:10–20, the land of Sarai and Abram is struck with famine and thus they flee to Egypt where they have low status. Deception becomes the only way to survive as Abram tells Sarai to tell the Pharaoh that she is his sister and not his wife (Niditch 2012:27). Consequently, a person or character that uses a condition or circumstance presented by his or her foes to put them in a favourable

position is considered a trickster (Matthews & Moyer 1997:55–57). For the most part, trickery narratives show the weak defeating the strong; however, the trickster also changes his or her condition by cheating and deceiving people. But what was the function of trickery in biblical narratives? As people of low status, tricksters tried to change their situation (Steinberg 1988:1). Trickery is what biblical characters resorted to in unusual situations, which helped them to attain their goals. Abraham, Jacob and Tamar all dealt with those in authority through trickery.

Deception is considered relevant in the book of Genesis because justice was important to keep the community of Israel at peace (Williams 2008:9). To the contemporary scholar, the presence of trickery portrays the position of the ancestors as questionable (Matthews & Moyer 1997:55–57). It seems that morality is not important in the narratives of the patriarchs. This may also indicate that morality may have been ambiguous in the Old Testament. Trickery might pose a challenge to interpretation as at present, lying and deceiving people bring into question the ethical character of a person.

## **2.9 Interpretation issues**

So far, we have focused on the various ways that are used to understand the Old Testament. This was done because even though biblical texts convey an adequate amount of information, a historical-critical or literary-critical approach can put the text into perspective (Barton 2010:79). Each method contributes to making the process of interpretation easier, but application still remains a challenge. For example, source criticism helps one to focus on the arrangement of the society that involves miscellaneous groupings and the beginning of the books, whereas form criticism looks at the social background (Barton 2010:134). Although these guiding principles are useful, they still do not make the process of Biblical interpretation easy.



In the beginning of this chapter, I pointed out that it is difficult to relate the Christian life to Jewish beliefs. Christians struggle to differentiate their own understanding of faith from Jewish ideas of worship, life and values because much effort is required to comprehend these concepts in the Bible. The focus on some of the methods served to address some of these views in the Bible. In terms of worship, Julius Wellhausen pointed out that Israel had different sources for religious practice, namely Yahwist, Elohist, Priestly and Deuteronomist sources. These indicated the different ways in which Israel presumably practiced their religion, which later led scholars to only consider a priestly source. Then, also in terms of values or morality, cultural practices were important. These practices served a particular purpose that was important enough so that the narrative allowed for trickery in cases where the narrative deviated from this purpose. As I previously pointed out, another way of understanding the Bible is to make use of sociology and anthropology. However, Whitlam (1998:35) cautions that there is a tendency to extend the social world of the Bible presented in texts to deduce meaning from evidence and reasoning rather than from explicit statements. But how does one find a balance between these methods? Barton (1996:3) argues that one can do so by drawing a map of interpretation with the different methods as a guide in directing a person towards understanding.

Because the Bible is regarded as a sacred book, texts are mostly interpreted in terms of theology (Goldingay 1987:57). A challenge in theology is that biblical scholars grapple to establish how to interpret the material about Israel in the Pentateuch. Through exegesis, a text is understood as relating to its own era, with the reader removing himself or herself from the text. Most scholars try to take a holistic approach to the material, but (as mentioned before) there is great diversity within biblical texts which makes it difficult to interpret if one tries to do it with the aim of creating unity (Knierim 1995:1). In trying to understand the Old Testament holistically by following a historical or literary approach, it is clear that the problem of interpretation in the Old

Testament is still not close to being solved. If Christians have to consider the people of Israel as a religious community from whom we can learn as a faith community, it can also be a challenge because some people argue that there is a difference between the religion of Israel and the theology of Israel (Anderson 1994:272–283). However, it is difficult to determine the religion of the patriarchs.

Another challenge concerning the Old Testament is that it has different theologies (Knierim 1995:1). This makes it difficult to use various methods (as pointed out earlier), since the problem is to find a connection between the various methods. Also, all the pluralities that are presented in the Bible should be considered because biblical texts are theological and when one reads a text, one is confronted with the theologies of every text in the Bible (Goldingay 1987:1). As a result, texts can hardly be considered in isolation from one another. For this reason, an overview of the book of Genesis is necessary to study the story of Judah and Tamar. The material that is captured in the Bible has a diverse range, which is cause for concern because various authors may have written it. Furthermore, studies have established that the Israelites captured their theology, outlook on life, values and customs at a much later stage than when they actually happened; therefore it is difficult to determine their attitudes in terms of morality at a particular stage (Niditch 2012:27). Any approach to the Bible or the Old Testament should therefore be followed with this in mind. As I previously pointed out in section 2.5.2 on Gunkel, the book of Genesis is a collection of works that are often also regarded as a library of books. It is important to note that biblical material has various authors and the material is presumably considered to have been written for a variety of audiences in different periods of time and life situations (Goldingay 1987:1–28).

Moreover, as these theologies were compiled periods apart from one another, it can be argued that the problem may possibly not be that the material existed

independently but rather that they are grouped together (Knierim 1995:1). Consequently, the challenge is to interpret the material as they exist in close similarity. To this effect, historical exegesis is considered helpful because it has been proven that the Old Testament is not the answer to current struggles to interpret the material captured within it. A problem may be that scholars have tried to take a holistic approach to the texts (Knierim 1995:3). When scholars approach a text, they do so with in attempt to create unity. As was illustrated with both the historical-critical approach and the literary-critical approach, any attempt at interpreting biblical texts should be done with a focus on how the text fits into the whole or the context, which causes a setback in understanding the text.

Any person who attempts to interpret a biblical text will encounter some problems. Various factors have to be taken into account in such an attempt. When it comes to the Pentateuch, scholars have mainly approached it in terms of history. In fact, the study of the Pentateuch itself is difficult. The reason for this is that the material in the Pentateuch has a wide chronological range and it is not clear how old the earliest texts and the proceedings that are captured in it are (Meyer 2000:4–11). Considering the material as the history of Israel remains grounds for strenuous discussion. The burning question that remains is how historical discrepancies should be dealt with. A fact that can be pointed out is that the surroundings of the patriarchs somewhat rule the information out as history.

Let us focus on the idea of faith for a moment. In the time of the patriarchs, their religion or theology was unclear. Furthermore, in the discussion on the religion of Israel, a distinction should be made between the religion of Israel and the theology of Israel, which was not yet formed in the time of the patriarchs. There is, however, a stance within the field to move from solely approaching Old Testament texts as history to considering it as literature. Various factors within the ancestral narratives indicate that it cannot be

regarded as history. Most of the material expresses the emotions, ideas and values of the people of Israel.

Proponents of the historical approach have pointed out that the narratives were written possibly as history for Israel in their particular life setting at a particular point in time and in a certain genre and form. Historians have tried to place the texts in their original context in order to find the meaning of the text and how it served to influence and inform the society or community of the day (Hayes 1979:83). A plus for the adherents of form criticism is that they have attempted to understand the writings of Israel by focusing on the lives of the people and the history they tried to establish through literary types. In this sense, the patriarchs can be seen as legends and not historical figures in the true sense of the word because their time, place and events cannot be determined. To consider the law in Israel, the law as laid down by the will of God is presented in the form of speeches by God to Moses, who in turn gave it to the people (Alt 1989:81 & 82).

The whole existence of Israel depended on God. A historical approach to the religion of Israel becomes a problem because it is unclear whether the traditions are historically accurate (Moberley 1992:79–104). To consider the patriarchs, for example, the only information to draw upon is the narratives in the book of Genesis (Grabbe 2007:39). The processes that led to the existence of this material are not clear. Another problem is that historians struggle to overcome the deficiency of context as it is difficult to situate the “text in chronological sequence, social and political context” (Whitelam 2006:255). It can also be argued that biblical narratives tell us about the religion of Israel and can hardly be considered history (Rogerson 2006:268–284). The evidence that the material is history is partial, and it is not adequate to form historical theories without firm evidence.

Recently scholars have again started to argue that the biblical material in the Pentateuch is history (Hendel 2012:51). Consequently, discussions have moved in the direction of grouping the material in the book of Genesis into certain categories that include a setting, cultural memory and form. In explanation, the notion of setting refers to the literary history of Israel, and scholars focus on the period of time of texts and the location along with the culture of Israel. Cultural memory can be explained as the link between the depiction of ancient times that is portrayed in the book of Genesis and whether the proceedings really happened. Also, form refers to the style and category of literature that can be found in the book of Genesis. There are some problems with the concepts of setting, cultural memory and form. In terms of setting, language may pose a problem as texts were carried over in Hebrew, whether it was orally or in writing. Language itself changes because the use of Hebrew may also have developed in the time that these narratives were transmitted, which creates a problem for chronology. Another point to consider is that presenting culture in Israel should be done as a whole, meaning that it should depict all the members who belong to the group (Hendel 2012:51).

Trickery is difficult to interpret, even from a literary perspective. For contemporary people, deception means to lie, cheat and deceive – which is unethical and not the kind of behaviour or the kind of people Christians are expected to be. This creates various methodological problems in that scholars struggle to make sense of texts, which causes difficulty in appropriating it for the Christian today. A literary stance can make it easier to comprehend. As was pointed out previously, trickery served to alleviate the underdogs in ancient Israelite society. As a result, creative writing is helpful. The fact that the Israelites continuously evolved also makes it difficult to trace ethical attitudes and currently we are left with various dimensions of Israelite ethics (Niditch 2012:27–29). Take the concepts of marriage and the law for example;

the meanings of the terms differ vastly in terms of what is connoted within the text and what is meant by it at present.

Ethical interpretation of the Old Testament is difficult because the Pentateuch contains a large amount of material and much effort is required to examine the texts methodically and in detail (Davies 2006:732–753). But how can we read the patriarchal narratives in Christian ethics? The patriarchal narratives lack moral content – or at least as morality is understood at present. The Israelites received a promise of blessing but there is little emphasis on their obedience to God in the narratives (Moberley 1992:79–104). How then do we interpret the religion or theology of Israel, the notion of community and the trickery in order to make it relevant for current society?

## **2.10 Conclusion**

In this chapter I described the different methods that are used in Biblical Criticism to examine biblical texts. I also examined the effectiveness of the various methods. The chapter began with a discussion of the book of Genesis and then went on to concentrate on the methods that have been developed by biblical scholars to help our current understanding of the patriarchal narratives. Through the different methods, one could gain an idea of the living conditions of the patriarchs. It is clear that each method can serve as a tool to understand a text in the Old Testament. More importantly, this in turn confirms the importance of taking the relationship between ethics and culture into consideration – which is the focus of the study. There is therefore a need to use these methods to investigate the narratives in the Old Testament. It is especially in view of this that Biblical Criticism has been helpful in identifying what type of material the interpreter may be dealing with. I concluded this chapter by highlighting the fact that as one examines the various methods, one will come across different issues in texts. This, therefore, is one of the

reasons why Biblical Criticism may be important in a study such as this one.  
The next chapter deals with the development of Christian ethics.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THE USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN CHRISTIAN ETHICS**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I give a historical overview of the use of biblical texts in Christian living and discuss the various phases of Christendom. I explain that during the development of Christianity, the social environment within which texts were interpreted was already a cause of difficulty in interpretation. The early church faced certain challenges within their society and how they attempted to deal with these, is essential for this study. They had to interpret their religious beliefs within a pagan society, resulting in a sequence of actions that was taken to improve and achieve Christian living. This spiralled into different periods and today still remains a challenge for Christians. These challenges gave Christian writers a great platform to create new ways to inform ethical living. Developments within Christianity influenced Christian ethics and the way in which texts are used for ethical formation currently.

The purpose of this chapter is to lay the groundwork for the main argument, which is that biblical texts are difficult to use because of the tension between ethics and culture. In view of this, it is important to establish this perspective for the study. The intent is to identify the contributions of different approaches in Christian ethics to interpret texts, and how these may be allied with other interpretations to form a framework of interpretation. Here the focus shifts to recent approaches in Christian ethics to interpret texts. Firstly, I look at the development of Christianity by focusing on the key influences in Christian ethics, namely the early church, philosophy and the Bible. Secondly, I identify various approaches (which are based on character and community) that can be useful when considering texts for ethical formation. It is also essential that the feminist standpoint be taken into consideration. Thus I also look at feminist views on texts.



### 3.2 The development of Christian ethics<sup>4</sup>

For the purpose of this study, it is important to grasp the development of Christian ethics. I am particularly interested in the different accounts of growth in early Christianity. The manner in which writers attempted to make sense of the Christian life in their societies accounts for the strain that existed between ethics and culture – or rather their social environment. I offer an in-depth discussion on the relationship between ethics and culture in a later chapter. The objective here is to represent this tension and some of the different traditions within Christian ethics as possible options to use biblical texts for ethical living. Early Christian writings depict the struggle of thinkers to integrate and interpret the teachings in biblical texts in their own time. There were different shifts within society that Christian writers had to confront and these are reflected in their various writings.

A number of key factors in the development of Christian ethics can be pointed out. These are the history of the church, philosophy<sup>5</sup> and the Bible (Wells & Quash 2010:1 & 2). It is important to focus on how these factors shaped Christian ethics as it helps to understand how the discipline developed as a field of study and, more importantly, what role the Bible played in this regard.

---

<sup>4</sup> There is a call within the field for a distinction between the terms “ethics” and “morality”. Mudge (1998:11–15) argues that the two terms should not be linked. There is some dissimilarity between morality and ethics in that morality can be understood as mores or customs that contribute to the formation of the person by the community, while ethics is a field of study that gives substance to this moral formation through critical and theoretical awareness. The main point is to determine the relation of human beings to ethics. Van der Ven (1998:2 & 3) explains morality as being more deontological, whereas the term “ethics” is teleological. Morality, then, is considered norms that are mandatory. Ethics is more focused on the aims of people’s lives. There are different views on the meaning of the terms. For the purpose of this study, the focus is more on ethics as the aim of human life. Also, ethics is the discipline that is aimed at giving method to and gaining understanding of the human task of finding moral significance (Macguire 1989:533–538).

<sup>5</sup> A number of approaches to ethics developed from philosophy, but virtue and Kantian ethics can be singled out. These two schools of thought can be pointed out as dominating normative ethical thinking (Hanley 2009:53–81). Aristotle contributed to ethics by shifting the focus to virtues (Pakaluk 2005:1–46). He focused on how people can live a virtuous life in order to live a good life. In his view, a good life is possible if people know how to function in life (Pakaluk 2005:1–46). Kant (1724–1804) focused more on duty. He argued that duty and responsibility are important in being moral (Hanley 2009:17–27).

What is essential to this study is that already within the early church Christians had found it difficult to use the Old Testament in their social setting. It should be hoped that throughout the discussion, it will be easy to perceive that Christianity became strained as social conditions changed. Therefore, the current complexity of using the Old Testament in Christian ethics is not unique to our time.

At this stage, it should be mentioned that in no way is the assumption made that the early Christians had one uniform ethic. However, Christian ethics<sup>6</sup> is closely related to faith because Christians act from belief, which makes Christian ethics unique in this sense (Womer 1987:1–4). Throughout the development of the Christian tradition, there have been difficulties with regard to the connection between ethical living and society. As the church developed, believers had to face various challenges. Here already Christian thinkers struggled to find ways to connect the ideas and values in biblical texts to what was happening in public. By focusing on the early church, we can understand the transformation that took place in the lives of the believers and how they dealt with the changes within the society to which they belonged. Changing circumstances in the public sphere made it more difficult to live out their Christian faith. This gave rise to new disputes in the societal surroundings. In the next section, the focus moves to the early church as a premise for a discussion on the developments within Christianity. As the discussion progresses, these challenges will become apparent and also the ways in which they dealt with these.

---

<sup>6</sup>Ethics, in the Christian tradition, concern morally right or wrong behaviour for Christians. In essence, human morality is not that different from Christian morality; although the Christian arrives at a moral decision mainly by drawing from an understanding shaped by faith. Christian ethics contemplates how the Christian should envisage and live a moral life within his or her faith community and the world. The focal commission of the Christian is to determine the connection between faith tradition and ethics. Therefore, it is important to consider the nature of the reliance between Christianity and ethics, and also what function faith tradition has in the moral way of thinking. Various arguments have been posed as to what should serve as a premise for Christian ethics (Geisler 1989:17; Richard 1988:23–30).

### **3.2.1 *The early church***

From the beginning of the early church, biblical interpretation was a problem. Believers struggled to understand the Jewish lifestyle in terms of values and how the narratives could give them better insight into being Christian. Consequently, Christians struggled to apply the teachings of the Old Testament in their social surroundings (Wells & Quash 2010:31–39). A conceivable reason for this difficulty is that they were surrounded by people with different belief systems, of which pagan religions can be pointed out (Tarnas 1991:106–119). Christians grappled to interpret their faith tradition among the various religious ideas and worldviews that formed part of their society. As Christianity spread from Palestine to the Graeco-Roman world, Jewish culture became affected by the character and behaviour of the people in the Hellenistic period (Ayers 1979:1–6). For example, Jewish culture was largely influenced by Hellenistic views, traditions and ideas (Tarnas 1991:106–119; Meeks 1986:65 & 66). In addition, when philosophy became an influence at a later stage the idea of a person achieving his or her potential was transformed into the Judaeo-Christian revelation.

Pagan religions were part of the Graeco-Roman world and had a Hellenistic character (Martin 1991:52–64; Hellerman 2001:2–4). Consequently, Roman authorities did not oppose these different religions. During the Early Roman Empire, there was a rapid increase in alternative religious and social groupings which made it all the more difficult for Christians to live out their faith in public (Hellerman 2001:2–4). This was due to pagans being critical about Christianity in that they considered the religion a superstition (Ferguson 2003:592–596). As a result, Christians were blamed for political problems and natural disasters, which led Christians to fear for their lives. This may have been the reason why the writings of Justin Martyr were apologetic in nature (Hellerman 2001:145 & 146). It is clear that Justin Martyr wrote in defence of the Christian faith. He wrote for non-religious communities and focused on the

way Christians should live, but not on their relations with other people in their society. In contrast, Tertullian was more controversial in his writings concerning pagan religions and openly opposed it (Hellerman 2001:173–175). He focused on how Christians were to apply Christian writings in their lives.

It is important to first focus on who the early Christian communities were as their faith was still new and it was difficult to live out; the early Christians operated underground (Ferguson 2003:592–596). This was a community of believers in which the identity of a person was shaped and he or she changed in character (Wells & Quash 2010:31–39). Furthermore, members were known and the way in which they had to act was also determined. It can be said that this was a people who served God according to a faith that was related to the idea of a kingdom in which the purpose of God was to create a holy people (Wells & Quash 2010:31–39). Before Christianity became a state religion under the Roman Empire during the rule of Constantine, the early Christians were a small group of believers who had to deal with pagan religions in their surroundings and thus they operated surreptitiously (Ferguson 2003:592–596). They were an exclusive group that did not take part in social events, although they did have relationships with outsiders. Wells and Quash (2010:39 & 40) argue that their main focus was to provide for the poor and to take care of widows and orphans. It can therefore be argued that the early Christians were a group that attempted to promote the basic physical and material interests of non-believers.

In relation to ethics, the early Christians were challenged to connect their religion which was based on Judaism to their pagan environment (Wells & Quash 2010:39 & 40; Horbury 1991:40 & 41). Another intricacy that can be pointed out was their struggle to determine how to be distinct from the Jews in life and worship (Horbury 1991:40–41). It was also difficult not to copy the ideas and values of the Jews because Christianity always had a feature of Judaism as Jewish writings were pivotal in Christian life and thought.

Nonetheless, Christians could identify with the principles and customs of the Hellenistic world in their time. They could borrow ideas found in philosophical conduct and thinking when they tried to make sense and live out Christian teachings and moral ideas (Wells & Quash 2010:31–40; Tarnas 1991:106–119; Meeks 1986:65 & 66). Hence, the first focus was on the law and classical ethics in that Origen (182–251 CE) concentrated on conventional behaviour and ethics.

Constantine became Emperor of Rome approximately during the period 306–312 CE. He had a preference for the Christian faith and the church, and sought to join the state and the church (Elliott 1996:117–119). Therefore Constantine allowed Christians to live their faith out in public. It was during his rule that Christianity became an official religion and this had a significant influence on the public sphere. As a result, a close connection developed between the church and the state. Where Christianity was once practiced in private by the early Christians, it now became a public religion with a prominent influence in public affairs. The church could now determine how people were to live in society, which is evident from the fact that Constantine declared Sunday a public holiday in 321 CE and it then became the day of worship for Christians (Wells & Quash 2010:40 & 41). People who had been ordained for religious duties in the church gained control of public positions (Elliott 1996:39–50). In addition, among the clergy new ideas started to form about theology, church practices and state power. This led to a schism within the church that later led to the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches (Bonner 1991:218–226).

With the Reformation came new challenges to Christianity in the form of new theological ideas. The Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century resulted in various changes and brought about strife. Christendom was somewhat freed from papal control (Wells 2010:47). In terms of Christian living, the emphasis shifted to a theology of grace. In their writings, Christian thinkers

such as Martin Luther (1483–1546) and John Calvin (1509–1564) tried to canonise the concept of grace. The focus of the Reformation was on the formation of the person rather than his or her actions. Therefore, some Reform thinkers emphasised the idea that ethical living is solely dependent on the grace of God. The Reformers also looked at the social order and the importance of state power in the dealings of people. They argued that the state could play an important role in the relationships of people (Wells 2010:48). However, later on, the church would be coerced to influence ethical living more within the private sphere.

### **3.2.2 Philosophy**

People's interest in philosophy was sparked when thinkers started to seek new ways of informing people how to live their lives, which later led to Christianity becoming more private. One of the ways was through classic philosophy. Plato (428–348 BCE) and Aristotle (384–323 BCE) were two key philosophers in this regard (Brown 1990:31 & 32, 43–48). They contemplated the lives of people in their world.

Plato argued that people see their world as being in the process of changing from one state to another (Meeks 1986:42–45). As a result, everything would eventually cease to exist and therefore the realm where things last forever and remain unchanged was of central importance. This is the point of the intrinsic nature of living. Consequently people had to figure out what their ideal was and the only way was through knowledge and philosophy, which explored the state of being true (Annas 2003:25–28; Pappas 1995:135–137).

Aristotle (384–323 BCE) was more concerned about people reaching their *telos*, which he argued was being happy (Ferguson 2003:339–342). He related happiness to imitating the gods and pointed out that a moral life is shaped by virtues. Consequently virtues formed good character, which is

established through logical thinking (Stead 1991:175–178). Plato focused on the idea of forms; whereas Aristotle, who was influenced by Plato, focused on the concept of actuality (Brown 1990:43–48). Aristotle opined that the nature of a thing is determined by a form which is then related to the Good. As teleological beings, human beings aim to attain an end or *telos* that is happiness; therefore “the extent to which humans achieve their *telos* is the extent to which they participate in the Good” (Kallenberg 1997:14 &15). Aristotle introduced the notion of function to explain the meaning of the term “*telos*”. “*Telos*” refers to the natural functioning of something. Hence a person can only reach the ultimate goal in life if he or she embodies certain good traits of character or virtue (Pakaluk 2005:1–46). He then developed what is known as the virtues. Virtues can be described as those characteristics that help a person to achieve his or her *telos* (Kallenberg 1997:14 &15). In the human life, virtues can enable people to carry out their function well in order to reach the Good.

Subsequently, Aristotle pondered that if he could point out what is virtuous, he would gain a better understanding of how people can flourish in life (Pakaluk 2005:1–20). For Aristotle, virtue denoted traits that contributed toward a person being good. Moreover, being human meant that a person would function well in life (Pakaluk 2005:20–46). A challenge here is the way in which human beings attain virtues. Virtues are characteristics that people embody in order to make the right decisions at the right time. A virtuous person is one with good character.

With the Enlightenment came a focus on reason. Thinking shifted to an emphasis on rationality as a means to live an ethical life. In this sense, modernity was the key influence in that people considered themselves more rational and more developed (West 2010:9 & 10). Kant<sup>7</sup> (1724–1804) shifted

---

<sup>7</sup> Kant argued that “if morality was rational, its form would be identical for all rational beings. Therefore, the moral thing to do is to follow those principles that can be universalized, that is, to follow

moral thinking to reason by pointing out that ethics was not based on history or religion (Dudley & Engelhard 2011:120–135); ethics was about the individual to whom duty and responsibility were the key factors for being moral (Hanley 2009:17–27). With his categorical imperative, he argued that people had an unconditional and binding moral obligation which was not dependent on their inclination or purpose but on reason (Appelbaum 1995:28 & 29).

### **3.2.3 *Developments in theology***

Whilst philosophers were considering new ways to live a better life in public, theologians were inspired to concentrate on new ways to live an ethical life. One of the key writers who resisted philosophical thinking was Justin Martyr (100–65 CE). Justin wrote an apology to defend Christianity but was martyred (Ferguson 2002:199). He argued that reason was from God and thus called for Christians to participate in the purpose of God. He wrote this in defence of Christianity because believers struggled to live out their faith in public. Whereas the public sphere was once ruled by ideas of Christian thinking, people now looked for ways to move away from religion.

It was for this reason that Tertullian (ca AD 160–225) wrote “An Apology” and “On Idolatry” in an attempt to try and seek ways for Christians to live out their faith in the new secular society (Womer 1987:51–68). In these writings, Tertullian called for order and more seriousness in the life of the Christian. In “On Idolatry”, he pointed out that Christians had to separate themselves from secular activities. He related theology to the daily lives of people and the

---

those principles that one could consistently wish for everyone to follow” (Dudley & Engelhard 2011:120). He asserted that one could create principles as universal law that would serve as a principle of humanity. Kant’s theory may prove relevant in the compilation of a governing system such as human rights. However, it is problematic in that it directs moral thinking without considering individual decisions as the individual, to some extent, becomes robotic when merely being directed by principles as a determinant factor.



profession they chose. He wrote to inform people about how to maintain a Christian and moral life (Womer 1987:22 & 23).

Augustine of Hippo contributed to the Christian faith by pointing out that human beings are fallen and therefore need salvation (Wells & Quash 2010:88–90). He shifted ethical thinking to be more theological in that he focused on the notion of grace as an absolute need. Aquinas (1225–1274) was more concerned with the fact that people have intellect and therefore certain standards of reason which help them to decide between right and wrong (Wells & Quash 2010:90–92). In his discussion on reason and virtue, Aquinas argued that people have the freedom to choose (McDermott 1993:390–396). He explained that Christians use virtue as their freedom to choose. Therefore, virtue refers to the behaviour of a person and not to his or her character.

With regard to the law, he considered it an act of will and not one of reason – although he said reason determines law (McDermott 1993:409–413). Law was therefore an extent of human conduct. Aquinas related ethics to natural law. In clarifying the idea of natural law, he argued that people took part in the purpose of God for creation (McInerny 2004:100–104). He also argued that in the universe, people have the same desires and drives; however, they are distinct in that they direct themselves knowingly to the satisfaction of fully achieving their potential. Hence a person not only has to know what to do, but is guided and directed into doing it (McInerny 2004:100–104).

At this stage, it is important to note that throughout the development of the Christian tradition, there was tension between ethics and culture in the continuous changes within the social environment when new ideas emerged. People continuously evolved and found new ways to live a better life. This caused some problems for Christianity and probably their use of the Old Testament. As I mentioned before, the first Christians struggled to relate to the

values and lifestyle of the Jews. Ayers (1979) argues that as Christianity spread, the church was challenged to convey the gospel due to problems of interpretation. This may not have been possible without corrupting the core of the received tradition (Ayers 1979:3–6). Subsequently, the emergence of Western philosophy has been the cause of many belief systems (including Christianity) undergoing serious transformation that also impacted Christian ethics and its use of the Bible (Sprintzen 2009:1–9).

### **3.2.4 *The use of biblical texts in Christian ethics***

Carro (1997:411) opines that when people discuss Christian ethics, it also involves culture ethics. He argues that ethics is always interpreted within a cultural milieu. It is important, therefore, to note that it is impossible to separate culture from ethics because ethics operates within a certain culture. Culture has a dual meaning here. For this study, it is important to consider not only the culture of ancient Israel, but also the culture within which biblical texts have to be interpreted and applied. Accordingly, in order to use and understand the events illustrated in the Old Testament, meaning has to be established in terms of the text. Furthermore, the reader of the text has to re-orient this meaning within a specific setting which may pose a challenge.

Biblical texts describe how the people of Israel behaved within their social setting. When using the texts in Christian ethics, the task is to determine how to apply and interpret texts to serve an ethical purpose for Christians. The difficulty is finding ways to do so. There are numerous discussions by contemporary thinkers concerning the use of biblical texts in ethical matters (Long 1965:149). For the most part, enthusiastically debated concerns remain unanswered with regard to the application of biblical texts. Already in early Christianity, believers struggled to relate teachings in biblical texts to their society (Wells & Quash 2010:31–39). Originally they considered Christian writings to have religious authority, hence their confidence in Christian

writings. This is evident in that they tried to distinguish between the old and new covenants, but concluded that the new covenant was more important as they were not subject to the Law of Moses (Ferguson 2002:13 & 14).

Language also contributed to this challenge (Khan 2013:3). In the second century, the early Christians merely had the Old Testament texts and had little means to make sense of it. Some people argue that assemblies became an important way to read biblical texts in an attempt to understand it (Paget 2013:559). It is presupposed that, quite possibly, the early Christians gathered as a community and engaged in discussions on how to deal with the challenges posed by the pagan religions and non-Christian communities that surrounded them. In addition, these meetings may have produced a platform for them to gain a clear understanding of what it meant to be a Christian (Paget 2013:549). It is, however, apparent that biblical interpretation played a pivotal role in how believers understood the texts. To return to the early church, Tertullian gave us an idea of the debates among Christians of his time in terms of the interpretation and application of Christian writings (Ferguson 2002:15 & 16). Furthermore, we can see that the church was concerned not only with the influence of the teachings in the biblical texts in the Christian life, but also with issues of behaviour.

Tertullian wrote “An Apology” in which he attacked Roman entertainment and called for Christians to abstain from such endeavours (Wells & Quash 2010:86 & 87). Justin Martyr, with the rise of philosophy as the new means of living a moral life, called for Christians to rely on the teachings in the biblical texts and not the knowledge of the people of their time (Ferguson 2002:4–7). It should also be pointed out that he struggled with philosophy and called upon people to adhere to the authority of the Bible instead. Throughout the development of Christianity, the use of the Bible has been a challenged because ideas, values and moral thinking arise in relation to life but they develop or grow faint in

constant dialogue within the social environment (Thorsteinsson 2008:140–145).

This remains the case in contemporary discussions on using the Bible as a source of Christian ethics. In fact, it contributes to a more responsible approach in using the Old Testament. Scholars are still debating the authoritative nature of the Old Testament as a source of ethical formation (Long 1965:149). No clear answers exist for the difficulty of using the narratives in the Old Testament to inform ethical living. Some people consider the use of the Old Testament in terms of the law relevant, based on the substance of regulation that can be found in texts; while others focus on texts in terms of the way that ethical choice can be reached (Long 1965:150). However, there is hardly any consensus on how texts can be used in Christian ethics.

How we appropriate texts in Christian ethics is often related to Biblical Criticism. Here, as argued in the previous chapter, the historical-critical and literary-critical approaches can be quite useful. These approaches were developed by biblical scholars to analyse texts and the various traditions that are found in texts (Evans 1984:30). Noticeably, the focus on ethics in the Old Testament has mostly been in terms of the law. Scholars who study the Pentateuch have identified the law as the foundation of ethics (Evans 1984:30). Scholars have taken a deeper look at the traditions in the texts and their functions in biblical communities with regard to theology and ethical needs. However, in order to understand biblical texts, it is important to focus on the gradual development of these texts. Many scholars argue that texts should be allowed to portray what they mean. Others argue that ethics in the Old Testament can be regarded as covenantal ethics (meaning obedience to divine commandments) which served to direct life in relation to God (Evans 1984:32). However, relating ethics to texts has mostly been done in terms of

the law. The focus was on how to take and use principles and standards of behaviour to inform current ethical living (Evans 1984:28).

However, this is not an approach that is favoured by many and it is argued that the Bible is not a code of just rules and therefore cannot be used as such (Cahill 2002:3–6). Instead, current approaches to ethics focus on the decisions people make and, to a certain extent, the actions people take (Loewen 1989:55). According to this line of thought, the individual has a number of options or points of reference when he or she makes ethical decisions. Ethics is therefore grounded in a perception of independence and self-determination (Hauerwas 1974:48–55; Loewen 1989:55). However, this view has been contested for being too secular and consequently thinking has shifted to ethics as story. With the focus on story, ethics is not only about action but is principally about shaping character (Loewen 1989:56). Accordingly, Christian ethics play a more significant role than establishing the reasoning behind decisions and behaviour. Christian ethics should entail the development of the disposition of the person.

In this sense, the early Christians serve as an example because they were also challenged to model their faith according to a sacred book that was written for a different religious community amidst changes within their own society. It is important to point out that the early Christians did not have the Bible as it is known to us today (Horbury 1991:81). Ayers (1979:3–6) argues that they had a problem with interpretation in the first stages of the religion, but later philosophical and rational thinking posed a problem. Many texts in the Old Testament contain information about the behaviour of people and this may be relevant for Christian ethics. Although morality in the Old Testament is complex, the moral witness of biblical texts did not only have meaning for the Israelites then but can still be used to inform contemporary Christian communities (Birch 2007:338–347). Moreover, biblical texts can be used in two ways when it comes to ethics: it can either be studied for the sake of

ethics or one can study the ethics in the Bible (Spohn 1984:3–17). In the first instance, biblical texts can be studied to inform our view of ethical concerns. In this sense, the text is used to shape ethical thinking that is focused on norms or standards. In the latter case, one can study the ethics in a text by focusing on the behaviour that is depicted and how this can inform ethical living.

This study focuses on how the Bible can be used in ethics today, although it may be a challenge not to concentrate only on the ethics in the Bible (especially when one studies a complex story such as the one of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38). Christians assert that they use biblical material to inform them about ethics, thus it is important to look for ways to gain simplicity in doing so. The purpose is to determine what role texts can play in the Christian life. In appropriating texts for current use, Christians attempt to determine the worldview and values of the characters in biblical texts, but this is difficult because it is not easy to relate the material to current issues (Cahill 1996:5–7). During the interpretation process, the focus is on another social grouping with a different viewpoint and belief system than our own (Grelle 2005:129–137). Today people have different values and see the world somewhat different than the people who lived back then. As the early Christians had to consider their social environment against the teachings of the Old Testament, so too must contemporary Christians.

### **3.3 Different approaches to the use of the Old Testament in Christian ethics**

Scholars use various approaches to look at the Old Testament texts in terms of deontology (Timmer 2009:1 & 2). In addition, there are scholars who focus on virtues with regard to character and identity (Timmer 2009:15 & 16). Other scholars focus on ethics in terms of action<sup>8</sup> because they argue that

---

<sup>8</sup> Harrington and Keenan (2002:23 & 24) argue that contemporary ethical thinking centres on action. In this sense, ethics can be defined as the study of good or bad actions that involve asking complex

individuals are self-determinant. In addition, the contemporary world encourages individuals to be free and autonomous in making decisions (Hauerwas 1972:698 & 699; Timmer 2009:15 & 16). Christians therefore have the option to make moral decisions in terms of the alternatives society or the world has to offer (Hauerwas 1972:698 & 699). In addition, the world tells people that they are free and responsible for their own life in terms of their values and outlook on life. As a result, the focus is on the level of ethical decisions and ethical living – which is not an easy stance.

Recent approaches in Christian ethics include ethics of character, ethics of community and the feminist approach to interpreting texts. In this study, I focus on the use of texts in the formation of character and community, and how texts can inform gender issues. This will help in the discussion on the story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38 which follows later. This focus is relevant because contemporary Christians have concerns about character, community and gender. In the discussion on character, my aim is to establish the different ways that scholars have pointed out in which texts can shape ethical character in a person. Character is formed in certain societal circumstances and therefore focusing on community as a means of shaping character is important. However, in current society, people have different views about gender. It is important to look at the feminist approach to interpreting biblical texts in order to determine how gender is represented in the text. This is integral to the discussion as it will later serve to pinpoint the

---

questions about norms and values. Here ethics problematise what is implied by human conduct because ways of demarcation, influence, the individual stimulus and the goals behind behaviour are highlighted. This theory is teleological in its approach and deals with the outcomes of the conduct of an individual. Teleology is also called consequentialism or utilitarianism, although these can be regarded as examples of teleology. All the same, teleology emphasises that the right actions are the ones that can be estimated to have the best consequences as opposed to alternatives (Curran 1999:66–72). Therefore, something is good if one achieves the goal and bad if it hampers one from attaining the goal. Recent debates have focused considerably on ethics of action as a means of advocating good behaviour in people. Here ethics can be described as the field of study that centres attention on human conduct with regard to norms that are drawn upon to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Present-day moralists emphasise the entire person rather than looking at the actions of people.

various challenges that are encountered in attempting to use biblical texts in Christian ethics.

Christian ethics is not necessarily distinct from culture. Ethics is always influenced by culture in that it develops in a cultural setting and is determined by current ways of living (Carro 1997:411 & 412). Therefore, when we read biblical texts, our society and culture influence how we express ethics. The Christian therefore has to consider his or her current society and, more importantly, also how the narratives in the Bible can be interpreted today. It is difficult to differentiate between or separate culture and ethics because culture comprises the values that are upheld by the larger group of people and the decisions that are made within the group are linked to these values (Hunter 2010:6–9).

A person who lives in a pluralistic society with different religious ideas and philosophical suppositions has a number of sources to draw from. This is a society with different social settings and different worldviews, but the people may be loyal to values that differ from those of Christians (O'Connor 2004:2–4). How does one deal with this? It is important that the Christian knows his or her social environment and also the social environment of the biblical characters. This will help him or her to understand the moral challenges they faced on a daily basis (Jerslid 1990:9–14). Therefore, the main problem for the Christian is that he or she has to take into account two surroundings or environments.

### **3.4 The moral authority of the Bible**

By and large, the Bible is regarded as an authoritative book that informs Christians about ethical issues. The important question is: How does the authority of the Bible function in Christian ethics? The answer is that its influence stems from the fact that Christians regard it as the authoritative book



to direct them in life (Jerslid 1990:23–27). But what is meant by authority? Birch (1991:29–33) argues that authority in this regard refers to the confidence with which it is used in matters of life within the world. For this reason, it has a recognised place to be used in ethics as the interceding witness between God and the religious community. Furthermore, authority in this sense refers to the Bible as a medium or witness of an active God in a religious community. Therefore, the Bible is a source of empowerment during one's life in the world (Birch 1991:29–50). Biblical texts, then, are acknowledged as being useful in ethics. The character and actions of the person are directed by the biblical material. The focus here is on the formation of character as well as the process of making moral decisions and how texts can be used for this purpose (Birch & Rasmussen 1989b:322–326). In this sense, authority can also be considered to be relative to a certain situation, which means it is comparative to particular situations or relationships (Bird 1994:33–64).

Significantly, even though the Bible is considered to be from God, it has limited authority in that it was written for the specific function to inform the Christian community and the world about God (Bird 1994:33–64). As a result, its influence could be perceived in terms of this limitation. It could therefore be pointed out that Christians consider the Bible as holy, with a message of salvation for its community of believers. As a caution, it has to be pointed out that we should not look at the Bible as the sole source to inform a person about ethical matters. It should function as an ethical source in conjunction with other sources of ethics. Therefore, it cannot be regarded as the sole source for the formation of character and actions (Birch 1991:29–50). Although the Bible can be used as a guide to deal with life issues, one has to do so in relation to other sources of authority such as philosophy and the church denomination of a person (Wells & Quash 2010:1 & 2). Christians have particular prospects with regard to what behaviour is fitting in terms of the Bible. Therefore one may consider it an alternative to philosophy and the tradition of one's church.

The use of biblical texts in Christian ethics is complex because the role of the Bible in ethics and morality is unclear (Jones 2001:16–28). This may be partly due to the difficulty that one has to consider how people gather information from texts not only to help them deal with complicated situations in life but also to shape them as people (Birch & Rasmussen 1989b:330–332). One may have to consider how the Christian identify with this ancient religious community. In considering ethics, a question that often comes to the fore is: If ethics is not (as it is commonly assumed to be) about the kind of action people take in difficult circumstances nor about adhering to rules or laws that have been imparted to a person, how should one appropriate it? There are various approaches to use the Bible in Christian ethics. What follows is a look at some of the ways in which contemporary scholars attempt to use the Bible in Christian ethics.

### **3.5 Christian ethics and persons of character**

In Christian ethics, biblical texts are used in various ways. Recently the focus has been on the notion of character. Character, in the Christian tradition, refers to the nature of a person and the attributes he or she has which set him or her apart from other people. It is important to understand that the focus can also be on an individual or character that develops within the narrative (Mills 2001:10–21).

A prominent figure in this tradition is Stanley Hauerwas. He concentrates on how virtues can be formed within a person. He responds to present liberal society by questioning whether people are primarily formed in freedom or whether they are free to begin with. A focus on autonomy, which is self-determined, begs the question “What place is there for being formed in the first place?” (Gunton 2000:214). Consequently, if the individual is a source of ethics, how does he or she form opinions about ethical living? Those in favour

of an ethics of character argue that virtues<sup>9</sup> can play an important role in Christian ethics. Virtues are habits that people acquire (Gunton 2000:218). Acts are not merely the result of the will, but also the result of habits people have developed.

Character ethics has a range of elements, such as the character of God, the role of the Bible, a focus on the moral agent as a free person and virtues of character (McFaul 2003:89–108). The line of thought here is that having virtue is essential to guide a person in making ethical decisions. The prime concern is the moral formation and moral self-expression of the person (Cahill 2002:3–17). Character ethics is concerned with the identity of a person and how this identity is formed (Harrington & Keenan 2002:23 & 24).

Hence, when using a biblical text, the person has to seek to develop character by asking various questions about the text. By doing this, the Christian community is placed within the biblical context in order to determine how the character of the new faith community can be shaped. The kind of person that an individual ought to be is, for the most part, formed by the values and ideas of his or her faith community (Cahill 2002:10). In this regard, biblical narratives can play a central part. In character ethics, the focus is on virtue ethics (Hauerwas 1974:48–67). It is argued that people are formed by the events that are captured in the narratives of texts. Accordingly, good action is encouraged through the development of people with good character (Cunningham 2008:21–41).

---

<sup>9</sup> The focus on virtue ethics in character ethics is to a large extent influenced by the writings of Aristotle and MacIntyre. MacIntyre was influenced by Aristotle, who focused on achieving the ultimate good of human life. Here it is argued that one can only reach the ultimate goal of human life if one embodies certain good traits of character or virtue. Virtues, therefore, assist the individual in achieving their goal in life. Virtue refers to a trait that contributes towards one being a good human being; moreover, it is what it is about being human that makes one perform well in life. Virtues are those attributes that guide one towards good actions, permitting one to thrive with purpose in life.

It seems that Hauerwas disagrees on this point. Hauerwas (1981:9–20; 1974:48–67) argues for a community of character with the main focus on the church that remains separate from society. In his view, the church has long been dominated and dictated to by the world. He asserts that the church has to solve its own problems and decline solving the problems of the world. His approach is too sectarian because Christians cannot only be defined within the confines of the church. They form part of a broader society with ethical issues that directly affect them.

Hauerwas (1974:48–67) also argues that vision plays an integral part in building the character of a person. Vision allows a person to take a particular stance in his or her approach to life and the world that can be delineated as character; character serves as a guide in directing a person to favour certain actions above others. Good people do not strive to obtain good character, but rather focus on symbolising it. Therefore character is what makes the standards of the Christian life easier to understand. Furthermore, he argues that the term “vision” can refer to having character and character traits, or to be a character. Character determines the action of a person as it contains the framework for being moral. It depicts traits that refer to the way in which certain actions are performed, while having character refers to the way in which a person manages as well as demonstrates consistency in expressing these traits.

With regard to morals, the focus is to determine how character is acquired and developed. Moral philosophy has called for a scrutinised life, one in which awareness or intentionality shapes the person and his or her actions. Hauerwas (1974) problematises the relationship between a person and his or her actions by posing the question as to how it should be understood. He also questions whether the actions of a person are a direct reflection of the kind of person and whether the character of a person depends on the kind of actions he or she participates in (Hauerwas 1974:50 & 51). He points out that the

notion of vision plays an important part in the life of the Christian. Therefore, the behaviour of a person can be measured in terms of their viewpoint on life. The outlook that a person has on life is influenced by his or her community and the customs of the group he or she belongs to (Hauerwas 1974:48–67). Hence the vision of the group is represented by the narratives that are learned and told within the Christian community (Nelson 1987:110 & 111).

Taking a stance from virtue ethics, character is said to be built on virtue and being (Harrington & Keenan 2002:23 & 24). A virtuous person is one who embodies certain attributes that guide him or her in making ethical decisions. Here a virtuous being suggests a process of communal shaping of the identity of the person (Cahill 2002:3–17). Virtue is formed within the community because people live in relation to one another. In this sense, moral identity is produced and perceived in Scripture with regard to the role of the community in the shaping process (Richardson 2007:102–104).

If a person practices virtue, it can play a part in character formation as good practices lead to the development of a virtuous person (Van der Ven 1998:384–386). Practice, habits and character are connected in the narratives that are told and the activities that are partaken in (Cunningham 2008:31 & 32). Van der Ven (1998:384–386) argues that if one can only embody good by practicing good and virtue through habits, then Christians can only be moral if they take heed of the narratives and are actively involved in activities. He relates character to features such as desires, the good and reason. He further asserts that there is a linkage between the suggestion of a good life subjugated by the notion of classic character and character formed by storytelling.

An important question to consider is what role good, especially moral virtues, plays in a narrative interpretation of character. Also, how does the tension between desire and reason relate to the telling of narratives about character?

Van der Ven (1998:345–386) presupposes that the character of a person is shaped by his or her interaction with other people and the narratives of his or her ancestors and descendants, in which language is an important factor. The narratives that people are told and tell about themselves are the ones they later embody. However, it is only by gaining an understanding and through partaking in storytelling that the person gains awareness of the kind of person he or she ought to be in the social group he or she belongs to.

People do not act independently from their intentions, beliefs and settings, but they act out narrative and therefore become co-authors of the narratives of their community (Nelson 1987:9 & 10). They form part of a narrative history where creative writing is put in the right location for moral stories and narratives that can influence the community (Kallenberg 1997:14 & 15). Although a person writes his or her own story, he or she is also related to the narratives of the larger social group. One can argue that these communities have a past that lunges into time or rather the present (Nelson 1987:50–54). Therefore, a person's character is shaped within a community.

### **3.5.1 Character formed within the community<sup>10</sup> of faith**

At the forefront of an ethics of community, Birch and Rasmussen (1989a:67–69) argue that community shapes the character of the person. The word “community” has various connotations but for the purpose of this study, it refers to a group of people who share a religion, have a similar worldview, and share common interests and attitudes. Birch and Rasmussen (1989a:68) further argue that if being moral means that one has to attain intrinsic worth, which gives the person the ability to determine what is ethically right, then it is only in partaking in communal life that the individual acquires this aptitude.

---

<sup>10</sup> In this study community refers to a group of social people who share a religion, have a similar worldview, and have common interests and attitudes. While character refers to how people understand themselves as moral beings, community refers to their social relatedness. In this study, I focus on community as a community of believers.

Furthermore, they maintain that people cannot gain an understanding of moral living separate from the community they belong to. Therefore, community shapes morality. In addition, a community is successful if its morals or ethics are passed on from one generation to the next because it determines how people relate socially. The members of a social group make decisions based on the identity of the group (Birch & Rasmussen 1989a:67).

The moral fibre of the group and their principles of right and wrong are shaped in the midst of contact with each other. When a group convene, members gain knowledge on how to live by its narratives and how to play a part in its customs; consequently they take on the character of the community (Cunningham 2008:38). Groups have different ways of identifying themselves. When a person becomes part of a social group, he or she may adopt certain features of the worldview of the group. The Christian community has its own character; therefore, when the individual joins it, his or her character is wrought by the distinctive features of the group. Hauerwas (1981:16) argues for character that is formed within a community by narratives. Christians also have their own story to tell. Although there is a difference between the theory of Hauerwas and the theory of Birch and Rasmussen, their theories do seem to overlap. All of them argue that community plays an important role in the moral formation of the person.

### **3.5.2 Narrative**

Telling narratives is a fundamental part of people considering their history, making sense of their present and directing their future (Cunningham 2008:31–40). Narrative gives one a better understanding of a society that is considered your own (Wells & Quash 2010:180–206). For this reason, narratives are significant in that it gives one the opportunity to partake in the life of the character presented in the story. It becomes a replica for spectators and readers to live by or to identify with. Within their community, people tell

stories which later become what they live by (Van der Ven 1998:339–386). This approach may prove difficult in terms of Old Testament narratives (especially if one considers the character of Tamar in Genesis 38, who deceives Judah through various unethical means but is still regarded as being in the right).

Notwithstanding this, a community is formed by the narratives that are told in different periods of time (as is the case with biblical texts). The community establishes how the plot and characters of a narrative will influence their characters (Cunningham 2008:66 & 67). As a result, narratives and customs are evident in a shared outlook and behaviour which can then also sustain the community through history and tradition. Therefore, it is important to note that the narratives people tell and are told depend on the community that they are part of (Cunningham 2008:39). The use of biblical material is controlled by the foundation on which the community is built. The way in which Christians incorporate the Bible in their lives is multifaceted. However, it is intricate to negotiate the period and difference between the milieu in which the Bible was originally written and the milieu in which people read the texts today (Fowl & Jones 1991:1–3).

Without a doubt, the moral make-up of a person is shaped in the course of friendships and practices of Christian communities; therefore, it is integral to understand narratives in close association with others. The distinctive nature of a person is shaped within his or her social group as people live in relation to one another (Birch & Rasmussen 1989a:67–74; Birch 1991:29–46). The moral life of a person is not isolated from his or her community. Hence, if people become separated from their community, they would struggle to recognise who or what they are as an alternative to establishing their uniqueness (Hauerwas 1981:9–15). Here narratives come into play in that they create a means of association linking the lives of people. Being moral means that one has to attain intrinsic worth, which gives one the ability to determine what is



ethically right. It is only in partaking in communal life that a person acquires this attitude.

### **3.5.3 History and tradition**

A group of people share a history which equips them with an understanding of regular actions. Thus there is a close connection between character and community (Birch & Rasmussen 1989a:67–74). The lessons that are learned within the religious group create an interactive process through which the individual is morally formed. History and tradition are created in the continuous dealings of the group of people (Cunningham 2008:21–41). The perpetuation of the group is often maintained through tradition, where biblical texts can play a significant role. A community is considered as flourishing if morals or ethics are passed on from one generation to the next. In this sense, the person gains an ethical view under the guidance of those who practice a particular moral life within the group (Hauerwas 1981:9–35). Also, the community is nourished and shaped in creating people who can effectively live out its story. The community of faith develops morality when they accept the Christian story as a means of or direction for moral living.

Importantly though, for a group who aims to develop people of good character within the community, Christian ethics of community should find a means to explain the different ways of human relationship without suppressing or altering the differences between the people within the group (Kirkpatrick 2001:1–19). There is, however, an important factor to consider in telling stories – particularly Old Testament narratives – and that is the notion of language (Ayers 1979:3–6). Meaning plays a pivotal part in this sense. The meanings of certain terms in the biblical texts may have differed in the past from what the terms mean today.

Take the notion of the law for example. One can point out that the term is understood differently today than the way in which the Israelites understood it. Also, in the Old Testament, the concept of community refers to the people of Israel (Mills 2001:1–10). Therefore, the narratives that are portrayed are about and for Israel. Barton (1998a:1–10) argues that these narratives should not be regarded as if they offer a universal moral code for all to follow, but rather represent difficult situations where people struggled within a given society. In the Old Testament society was constructed on patriarchy. Men were regarded as the authority figures in the family and therefore also in the community. It may be easy to appropriate certain characteristics of this society to gender in contemporary society. Needless to say, gender roles in contemporary society have (seemingly) changed – which makes a discussion on gender of interest. It is important, therefore, to emphasise that the way that gender is portrayed in the Old Testament is vastly different from what we consider it to be today. A look at how feminists interpret gender in biblical texts is important.

### **3.7 Christian ethics and gender**

Feminist approaches to biblical texts have shed some light on gender issues. Ethics that focus on gender are concerned with how men and women should understand themselves in society. Recently, it has become important to establish gender and the roles of men and women within society. The contributions of feminist in interpreting biblical texts are important. Feminists focus on the experience of women in life (Goldingay 2011:277–280), particularly on how women have been prevented by men to move forward in life. Feminists argue that women are just as intelligent as men and they can also contribute to intellectual and ethical matters (Goldingay 2011:281 & 282). In focusing on the Bible, feminists examine a biblical text to look at how it has been affected by patriarchy. The aim is to highlight that women do not have worth merely because they are able to bear children. Feminists try to point out how women have been marginalised in the narratives of the Pentateuch. Their

contribution is of value because they bring a new perspective on matters of gender (Goldingay 2011:283–286).

Scripture also informs people how gender identity affect their daily lives. Gender as it is referred to in the narratives of the Old Testament may not be the same as how it is understood currently. Today gender is no longer defined in terms of male and female sexuality, and various forms of sexuality are considered. In this instance, gender is not associated with biological sex (Camp 2007:532–534). It refers to the physical body that determined the different roles men and women had to play within their society. Gender roles in the Old Testament can be described as the actions that were expected from men and women in the community of Israel, and may have varied from one context to another.

### **3.7.1 *Patriarchy***

A focus on patriarchy is important because it helps one to appreciate the power struggles within the story and the setting within which they arose. More importantly, it helps one to understand how the story can be relevant today. In this regard, feminist interpretation plays an important part by helping the reader to understand the concept and how they can use it in the current context. Feminist biblical interpretation emphasises the patriarchal nature of the Bible and the material captured in it (Soulén & Soulén 2001:58–61). In addition, feminists try to uncover how women experienced their world by focusing on the insights and knowledge of women as presented in the events of biblical texts.

Even more so in reprimanding contemporary means of interpretation. Furthermore, feminists point out how traditional ways of interpretation has discriminated against women and how this still prevails. In patriarchy the relationships of people are considered in terms of a hierarchy where men are

looked upon as the authority figures. In the Bible, men occupied positions of authority, such as the leader of the household; whereas women were mainly wives and mothers, although some also had the opportunity to be judges or prophets (Camp 2007:532–534). In Israel, women were under the legal authority of the male head of their households and when they married, this could be the father of the household of their husband (Greengus 2011:11–20). Hence it can be argued that gender roles in Israel were determined in terms of family or community (McDonald 1995:75–80). Presumably, the most important role for both men and women was to coproduce children since it was important that the man's name and inheritance be carried over to his offspring.

### **3.7.2 Gender roles**

Arguably, in contemporary society, biological features are considered important in determining gender roles. Arguments have been posed that gender roles are based on a number of factors, for instance biology, sexuality or sex, and family (Camp 2007:532). Originally, feminists mainly focused on the role and function of women in the Bible (Camp 2007:532–534), but later they focused also on the men. As a consequence, it can become a predicament when one attempts to link gender roles in the Bible to current concerns. With reference to the family, it should be mentioned that there is a vast difference between the contemporary family structure and the family portrayed in the book of Genesis.

Some scholars argue that paternal authority is important to uphold discipline within the family (McDonald 1995:86–90). Furthermore, a father who upholds discipline in his family ensures a stable and secure home. However, it can also be argued that this model does not take the contemporary structure of the family into account. Today, the structure of the family has changed in that it can also comprise two men or two women raising children or forming a partnership without children. Some heterosexual couples prefer not to have

children, which may pose a challenge to the patriarchal model of the family. However, the family is still considered pivotal for the survival of culture and was especially so for the survival of Israelite culture (McLaren 1994:153–168).

### **3.7.3 *Gender in the Old Testament***

For the abovementioned reasons, feminists argue that the modern family should serve as a means to implement change in gender roles (McDonald 1995:75–104). However, using Scripture to address current issues on gender and its role may be a cause for concern. It can be argued that that the focus is too much on the problems of gender than on its purpose (McLaren 1994:121–152). However, as a patriarchal book, the Bible may not have much to inform us about on current gender issues. Take the role of women, for example. The structure of the family in the biblical texts is different to what is known to Christians and people today. Israelite society was a patriarchal society, where the males were central and women did not enjoy the same rights as men (Wildavsky 1994:37–48). Women in the Bible were mostly confined to domesticity, with some exceptions in the Old Testament. Notwithstanding the exceptions, women participated differently than men in the social conditions of their time and place (Brenner 1985:78–83).

Feminists also often point out that women in the Bible are objected to oppression and they look for ways to change the lives of women and establish justice from a female perspective (Loades 1998:81 & 82). They attempt to do so by focusing on the injustices that are still prevalent within present society. Landman (1984:1-10) points out that feminist theologians make use of what is called remodelling. Here biblical texts are used to reconstruct socio-political conditions in order to determine to what extent women participated in their society or history. It is argued that the feminist task is then to establish to what degree women in the Bible were successful in their attempts to manage on their own. A danger here is that we are left with what can be called scruples

regarding what Israelite society may have been. Therefore, without solid information to support arguments and reconstructions of the women of Israel, one may become too creative in portraying a picture of these women that may never have existed.

Phyllis Bird has provided meaningful insight into the connection between “historical and constructive tasks” (Cahill 1985:45–58). She questioned whether the determinant role for men and women was to perpetuate humanity, and to what degree we should continue to establish the social roles of men and women in terms of their biological make-up (Cahill 1985:83–90). Certainly, the social context of a person determines what it means to be masculine or feminine; thus it is important to look at the role of culture and society (Farley 2006:109–110). Christians turn to the Bible to find answers to their moral questions and many times the guidance receive are puzzling and unused (Farley 2006:174–206). This may be the case because the Bible is based on political and familial contexts in which fertility was a central focus. Therefore, it is a challenge to use the patriarchal model of sexual relationships to deal with issues people face today.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

This chapter focused on the development of Christian ethics in the broader context of the development of Christendom. I discussed how Christian ethics developed in terms of the history of the church, philosophy and the use of the Bible in different periods. It appears that already in early Christianity, believers struggled to interpret their beliefs in the context of their social surroundings. It is important to note that it seems the use of the Old Testament is difficult because the reader or interpreter has to constantly be aware not only of the tension between ethics and culture in the text, but also in his or her own world. In the following chapter, I discuss Genesis 38 and how the narrative can be used in Christian ethics today.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **THE NARRATIVE OF JUDAH AND TAMAR**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I explore and analyse the narrative of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38. Thus far, this study has shown the important role that methods of biblical criticism can play in analysing a text from the Old Testament. Furthermore, some approaches in Christian ethics have been identified that can be useful for this study. Methods of biblical criticism have given us insight into cultural issues pertaining to the patriarchal narratives, while approaches in Christian ethics have enhanced our understanding of the relative importance of the way in which ethics and culture are connected. What this means is that behaviour is influenced by culture and society. As one examines a narrative, it appears that moral conduct is directly connected to the society to which the person belongs. At this stage, this approach is central to this study.

My objective in this chapter is to discuss the narrative of Judah and Tamar by using some of the approaches of Christian ethics. I start by analysing and examining the text in terms of its social world. Here the text is discussed with reference to the explanations of biblical scholars. Then the focus shifts to Christian ethics, with the aim of establishing how the narrative can shape character and community. It is hoped that the result of this endeavour will give insight into using the narrative in Christian ethics.

#### **4.2 The narrative of Judah and Tamar**

Genesis 38 is the narrative of Judah and his family who have to fulfil the levirate duty. Judah marries the daughter of Shuah, a certain Canaanite (Genesis 38:2), to whom three sons are born: Er, Onan and Shelah (Genesis 38:3–5). Judah gives Tamar as a wife to his oldest son Er, but Er became

wicked in the eyes of the Lord and therefore the Lord put him to death. The narrative does not indicate the reason for his death other than him being wicked (Genesis 38:7). Judah orders Onan to perform the levirate duty, whereby he has to sleep with Tamar to produce offspring for his deceased brother. While Onan seems to have fulfilled the duty, he prevents Tamar from becoming pregnant by spilling his semen on the ground (Genesis 38:9). He too is considered wicked in the eyes of the Lord and therefore he too is put to death. Judah, now only left with one son Shelah, fears the loss of another son and therefore he sends Tamar back to the house of her father, where she has to wait until Shelah becomes old enough to fulfil the duty. It is during this time that the wife of Judah dies (Genesis 38:12) and after he has recovered from grieving, Judah goes to Timnah to attend a sheep-shearing festival.

By this time (Genesis 38:12–14), Shelah is grown up but has not been given to Tamar to fulfil the levirate responsibility. Tamar must become aware of this and thus realises that Judah will not give her his last son. She must have found out that Judah will attend the festival and, consequently, she devises a plan. She disguises herself as a prostitute and goes to sit beside the road (Genesis 38:13 & 14). Judah regards her as a prostitute and asks to come in unto her. Tamar requests his seal and cord as payment. With the arrangement complete, Judah sleeps with her and then leaves to carry on with his life. Tamar returns to the house of her father, pregnant. When Judah finds out about the pregnancy, he calls for her to be burned to death, as he knows she has been unfaithful. In challenge, Tamar presents him with his seal and cord as proof of her fornicator. Judah recognises his belongings and exclaims “she is more righteous than I” (Genesis 38:26). The narrative concludes with Tamar a heroine, to whom two sons (Perez and Zerah) have been born (Genesis 38:29 & 30).



### 4.3 Understanding Genesis 38 in terms of Biblical Criticism

It has already been established that as part of the patriarchal narratives, the Genesis 38 narrative contributes to the overall plan and function of the book of Genesis (Sailhamer 1994:47 & 48). It therefore contributes to the literary context of the book. However, it may be argued that this is a family narrative and not necessarily a historical account of Israel (Fretheim 1994:602 & 603). Despite the fact that the text can be considered a family account in terms of literature, the narrative creates anxious uncertainty about what may have happened to Joseph after his brothers had sold him in Genesis 37.

In terms of Biblical Criticism, if the narrative is interpreted according to the documentary hypothesis, it is placed within the J source. This may be due to the fact that the J source relates to models of promise and fulfilment, but it could also be based on the association with the narratives in Genesis (Devega 2007:154 & 155). In his commentary, Westermann (1986:46) argues that the chapter was fitted into the Joseph narrative in order to preserve the narratives of the family of Jacob. Westermann voices concern about the allocation of the narrative to the J source. He cites various reasons in support of his argument. He presupposes that the assumption does not hold ground because of linguistics. The narrative also has a vast genealogical frame, which is not characteristic of the J source. Subsequently, the only certainty about the text is that it has been added because Judah is one of the sons of Jacob, which makes this a family narrative that is not essentially about tribal history (Westermann 1986:48). He therefore concludes that Genesis 38 stems from oral tradition.

But what role can Biblical Criticism play in the interpretation of the text? Before commencing with the process of interpretation, it is imperative to know what type of text we are dealing with. Genesis 38 clearly portrays events about people and their actions in their community. The narrative further reveals that

there are some discrepancies in the occurrence of the events. The importance of using methods developed in Biblical Criticism may be highlighted at this stage of the study. In terms of the literary-critical and historical-critical approaches, the literary approach can inform the reader about the narrative art while the historical approach can advise about the customs and family in the text (Wenham 2000:5 & 6). The fundamental role of a biblical study of the text is to provide a detailed account of the events that take place in the narrative (Barton 1996:1 & 2). Take trickery for example: Why is it allowed in the text? What is its function within the text? Another concern is the levirate duty. Why is it important that it is adhered to? More importantly, how should the reader interpret these concepts? These are the issues within the text that biblical scholars can help to explain. Unquestionably, the reader will read the text with his or her own concerns in mind (Rogerson 2001:138 & 139). Therefore, investigating this text from an ethical viewpoint may demand a focus on the various methods that have been developed in Biblical Criticism. These methods can make it easier to deal with ethical questions presented by the narrative. As discussed in the next section, different tools may be helpful in understanding the text but in this study, the text may more aptly be described in terms of the social world of Genesis 38.

#### **4.3.1 *The social world of the narrative***

Genesis 38 tells the story of the family of Judah (Fretheim 1994:602–607). Judah and his family have to face the repercussions of death. His son died and he is left with a widow in the family. As the head of the family, Judah has to ensure that the levirate duty is upheld. As has already been established, the levirate responsibility was a customary practice that would serve to preserve the name of his son Er within the community (Davies 1981b:250). The situation becomes more complicated when his second eldest son tries to fulfil the duty but also dies. It appears that the execution of the levirate duty turns into a predicament. Surprisingly enough, this cultural practice that supposedly

has to continue life ends it. Instead of perpetuating the family, it seems that Judah's family is dying out. As an alternative to instructing his last son Shelah to perform, the levirate duty, Judah instead requests that Tamar return to the house of her father.

The circumstances and events led Tamar to become a trickster. She later deceives Judah into thinking that she is a prostitute. Judah sleeps with her and she becomes pregnant. This is all the more confusing in view of the fact that she is considered to be in line with what is expected from members of the community. Both Judah and Tamar use unconventional means either to perform the duty or to find a way out of it. Yet the impression is given that the levirate law served a necessary function within this community. Even though most biblical scholars argue that it mainly served to ensure that the deceased husband was perpetuated in the community, some argue that it could have served a dual purpose (Davies 1981a:142–144). The narrative is about the plight of Tamar as a childless widow in her community, because the family of her deceased husband does not fulfil their responsibility in terms of family relations towards her. Furthermore, it can be argued that the levirate law might also have served to ensure the survival of Tamar within her community. If one considers the concept of the levirate duty in the text, it is clear that the duty plays a significant role in the trickery and deception that take place in the narrative.

However, despite the reasons given as justification for the trickery and deception, the way in which the events depict morality may be a cause of concern for the contemporary interpreter or reader. It is clear that the behaviour of Judah and Tamar is open to discussion. Firstly, it appears that they pay little attention to the biblical laws (Menn 1997:41–43). In Exodus 34, it is clearly stipulated that the Israelites should not marry Canaanite women; however, Judah not only marries a Canaanite woman but also gives one to his son Er to marry (Bridge 2009:67–70). Secondly, the situation is aggravated by

the fact that Judah comes across as a man who fails his family and community by not being obedient and faithful to the cultural practice of the levirate duty (Brueggemann 1982:307–312). In addition, his unruliness puts Tamar and the whole district under threat. This leads Tamar to commit adultery through prostitution, which results into her misleading Judah. Surprisingly enough, despite this unacceptable conduct, Tamar is perceived as a poor, childless widow who has suffered a grave injustice by an authority figure. Both Judah and Tamar remain guilty of deception. The narrative later reveals the fact that, deception or not, Tamar is the one who is in the right.

These are issues that the interpreter has to consider in the interpretation of the text. Interpreters raise their own matters of concern in the attempt to understand the narrative. They can choose to take into account the explanations of biblical scholars when they make judgements about the narrative (Menn 1997:1 & 2). This may be because the narrative best makes sense within its own context (Roop 1987:248–254). In other words, a look at the social world of the narrative can inform one's interpretation of the events that occur and can help in understanding the deceptive nature of the narrative. It is clear from the above that in order to use the text in ethics, it is important to think about the society to which Judah and Tamar belonged. Accordingly, it could be argued that the narrative only makes sense if it is considered within its own community.

#### **4.3.2 *The theme of the promise of progeny***

Biblical scholars make it clear that the promise of progeny is a key feature of the patriarchal narratives (Davidson 1979:222–230; Wenham 1994:366; Collins 2004:100 & 101). The narrative of Judah and Tamar is in accordance with this (Ross 1988:611–620). This is evident in the fact that Judah attempts to retain an heir, while Tamar goes to great lengths to obtain one. Instead of giving her his son, Judah requests that she return to the house of her father

without any inheritance rights or the opportunity to remarry; he expects her to remain there until he decides otherwise (Gunn & Fewell 1993:36–38). She obeys Judah's request and returns to her own family to wait for him to give one of his sons to her in compliance with the levirate law. After a while, she decides to take matters into her own hands and to provide her late husband with an heir. She does so by means of prostitution and risks her life in the process to protect the memory of her husband. She counted on Judah to allow one of his sons to perform the duty, but he denied her this fulfilment. One also has to consider the dilemma of Judah, who has already lost two of his own sons and may well have tried to look out for his family by keeping his last son from her as a means of protecting his family. However, being without an heir makes Tamar's future uncertain and means that her late husband's legacy will not live on in the community (Brodie 2001:351–364).

Besides the importance of perpetuating the community, family relationships were another essential element in this community. Gerstenberger (2002:31) posits that the family was the source not only of loyalty to the community but also of trustworthiness. Children therefore had the sacred responsibility to fit into the community and to ensure that the community flourished. The above then raises awareness of right relations between members in this community (Davidson 1979:222–230). It can be argued that relationships were shaped by the traditions of the group and therefore the narrative depicts the importance of upholding tradition in order for the community to survive. Morally good behaviour in terms of relational responsibility was imperative within the family because the family ensured identity within the community (Matthews 2005:520–530). Each family member had a duty to fulfil toward the other in terms of their relationship (Malchow 1996:16 & 17).

Every family member was subject to the established customs, but the weaker person could make a serious request for the reversal of a decision (Gerstenberger 2002:31). This explains the behaviour of Tamar, who appeals

against Judah's decision not to fulfil the levirate duty. Although the means of doing this leads to deception, both are dependent on the levirate law. For this reason, Judah exclaims "[s]he is more righteous than I" (in Gen 38:24–26). At this point, it is important to note that justice was based on the way people treated each other within the family. In other words, justice referred to behaviour that conformed to cultural practices (Manor 1984:135). A person who fulfilled the conditions imposed on him or her by these relationships was seen as righteous. Hence, in this case, righteousness should be considered in a strictly legalistic sense (Birch 1991:153 & 154). The injustice is that Onan has no intention to perform the levirate duty but still sleeps with Tamar. Instead of being loyal to his deceased brother, he serves his own interests as he would presumably forfeit the inheritance, which would go to the heir he and Tamar conceive because the child would be considered the son of his brother Er (Davies 1981b:257–268).

Tamar could also have brought him before the elders for punishment as set out in Deuteronomy 25:5–10, where it states that a widow could bring her brother in law or next of kin before the elders if they refused to fulfil the levirate duty. The elders would have reprimanded him even though they could not enforce the duty upon him. In such a case, the widow was allowed to publicly humiliate the man. This may have been the reason why Tamar requested the seal and cord of Judah as payment for her sexual favours as she later may have exposed him. However, the narrative does not indicate this; instead, Tamar devised her own plan to fulfil the duty. It seems that the author had high regard for and wanted to be true to cultural practice, because one is not sure about what the author approves or disapproves of (Barton 2010:79–108). As an authority figure, Judah was expected to prevent this type of behaviour in his family. He had to ensure that Tamar was treated justly (Wildavsky 1994:37). By fulfilling his responsibility, Judah would have restored not only the name of his son but also the happiness of his family because the group would continue to exist (Calvin 1975:295–300). It seems that Tamar is the

only one who fulfils the demands of the relationship, because Judah deprives her of her right (Malchow 1996:16 & 17).

This means that the interpreter or reader has to keep this in mind when he or she attempts to find ethical meaning in the text. Rogerson (2012:28) argues that although biblical texts can guide the believer in his or her daily life, the Old Testament contains material that is often displeasing to modern readers. Also, the behavioural traits of some of the characters are not only unlawful but also distasteful to contemporary readers (Rogerson 2012:29). For this reason, it may be difficult to find a link between Christian ethics and biblical ethics. In considering Christian ethics, the behaviour of both Judah and Tamar may seem rebellious (Rogerson 2001:29–41). However, if the narrative is linked to biblical tradition (Roop 1987:248–254), Tamar is in line with the cultural practice – which was/is the purpose of God (Wildavsky 1994:37–48). Judah is not.

It is evident that it is important to understand the community and also their customs, such as the levirate duty and the concept of the family, to make sense of the text. Wenham (2000:5) argues that because of the differences between the text and contemporary thoughts, it is essential to gain knowledge of the customs for an ethical approach (Wenham 2000:5). In this sense, Biblical Criticism plays a significant role in helping us to gain better knowledge of the importance of cultural practices, since it is the task of the ethicist to deliberate on the possible ethical meaning of the text.

#### **4.4 The use of the narrative in Christian ethics**

An important element of current interpretation is that the interpreter has to decide how the narrative can give formative quality to Christian ethics (Verhey 2004:14). However, if the interpreter has to decide of what use the narrative can be to Christian ethics, it is essential that he or she takes into consideration

that today Christians differ in moral standing and ideas (Cahill 1996:3). A person does not make moral decisions or act morally without having an idea of what is morally good or acceptable. Therefore, your behaviour is indirectly related to the kind of person you are. Accordingly, one should keep these factors in mind when one attempts to use the narrative. It should be noted that some features in the narrative may pose problems. For example, the contemporary thinker/reader may regard Tamar as a deceiver who would do anything to accomplish her goal. However, if the text is viewed in terms of its social setting, she is a person who is dedicated to her family and custom, and therefore fulfils the purpose of God because she risks her own life to obey. In contrast, the interpreter may view Judah as a selfish abuser who misuses his authority. Although injustice definitely plays an important role in the narrative, this may not be the message that the author is trying to bring across (Jeansonne 1990:98). The worldview portrayed in the text is vastly different from the social context of the interpreter or reader. One has to consider that Judah and Tamar formed part of a particular society. Their behaviour should therefore be considered as being informed by their social setting. A characteristic of Old Testament narratives is the connection between the family, the community and the well-being of the person (Brueggemann 1982:307–312). Tamar can be viewed as a loyal family member or, so it seems, as willing to do whatever it takes to ensure the preservation of the family (Janzen 1994:9–15). Thus the narrative does not draw the attention of the interpreter to the situation but rather to the kind of person Tamar ought to be in the situation as part of a particular society (Hauerwas 1981:9–13). It is important to keep this in mind in the when attempting to use the text for ethical formation.

For the most part, the narrative addresses right relations between members of the society (Phillips 2002:201–210). This, in turn, confirms that the levirate custom served to ensure the prosperity of the group in that the deceased husband continued to live through offspring (Wenham 1994:366–368; Alter



1996:217–223; Frymer-Kensky 2000:161–163). But the widow was also ensured prosperity within the community. It is clear that the behaviour of Tamar is in line with the custom, irrespective of how bad the interpreter may regard her actions to be. In her own society, she is portrayed as a loyal wife and family member. However, the same cannot be said of Judah.

It is important to analyse the text within its context because it provides insight into the original purpose of the narrative. Fundamental issues about the text and its use are relevant if the details are to be used within another context. There are reasons behind the actions in the narrative (Evans 1984:27). A difficulty is to determine whether the moral attitude in Genesis 38 can be interpreted in terms of approaches in Christian ethics. Therefore, apart from using methods of biblical scholars in order to examine the text, it is also important to use different approaches used in Christian ethics. Possible approaches are an ethics of character and an ethics of community.

#### **4.5 Shaping character in terms of Genesis 38**

One of the current approaches to biblical texts in Christian ethics is character ethics. In terms of character, this study is concerned with how the character of a person in the narrative can help to inform moral formation. The actions of people are connected to the kind of people they are. As a result, my aim is to look at the text as a source to shape people's morality. I therefore look at the notion of character as shaped by the narrative. This is done to gain a good understanding of the moral outlook on life through the eyes of the characters. At first, this appears to be impossible because the characters of Judah and Tamar are not developed within the narrative. Although character can be based on theories founded on virtue and character traits, this is not the focus of this study.

Character in this study is informed by the ideas of Hauerwas (1974:48–50), who points out that a person can have character/character traits or he or she can be the character. Any person who belongs to a group has a particular outlook on life that is influenced by the group. The outlook or worldview of the group helps the person to examine his or her conduct, which later shapes the person. It could be argued that character can also refer to the moral qualities that are distinctive to a person. Character in this sense is examined in terms of a characteristic, especially one that assists in identifying a specific group. Therefore the text is discussed as a source to inform ethics of character.

It is important to note that a prominent characteristic of ethics in the Pentateuch is that it is used in terms of the formation of character with regard to duty (Wright 2003:224 & 225). In this sense, the individual's inner stimulus is developed to direct ethical behaviour so that he or she may act from a sense of responsibility. It would appear that in dealing with narrative, it is important to bear in mind that character is presented from the reality of the text itself. The behaviour of Tamar is the ideal example that a sense of duty has been instilled in her to uphold cultural practices within the family and the community (Wright 2003:229 & 230). Her sole obligation is to provide her deceased husband with an heir and she does everything possible to ensure that this happens. Consequently, she depicts moral behaviour because she fulfils her responsibility towards her deceased husband as an obligatory custom. Hence, her virtuous character and identity are linked to the community that she is part of and she remains true, in actions and behaviour, to this community. In terms of character, Tamar is done a great injustice but she nevertheless personifies loyalty in that she remains dedicated to her deceased husband and his family. Good people do not aim to obtain good character, but rather focus on symbolising it (Hauerwas 1974:50). In this sense, the character of a person can be described as character that is shaped and developed in terms of a specific community. The characters of Judah and Tamar are shaped within their community.

#### **4.5.1 A character of trickery**

Despite the fact that character is shaped within community, for the contemporary interpreter, trickery is a concern. The narrative reveals that Tamar tricks her father-in-law into sleeping with her while pretending to be a prostitute. As a result, she falls pregnant. Judah is also guilty of deception. He is moderately unruly and his behaviour is not in line with custom (Brueggemann 1982:307). It is clear from an attentive reading of the narrative that the unruliness of Judah triggers the deception of Tamar; therefore, no moral judgement should be passed on Tamar. It appears that her acts of trickery are tolerable in her own context since it guarantee a favourable outcome in the narrative (Fretheim 1994:320). What all this means is that it is only when the actions of Tamar as well as all the surrounding factors of the narrative are taken into consideration that one can make a moral judgement (Macguire 1994:284). In spite of the fact that trickery has a negative connotation in current ethical thinking, within the text, it seems to have an elevated state.

In narrative criticism, trickery is explained with regard to social conditions (Niditch 2012:35). Tamar resorts to trickery because of her social condition. Where character is concerned, the narrative depicts the ordeal of a person who has low status within her society. As a person who occupies a lowly position, Tamar is allowed to improve her social conditions (so to speak) through trickery because she it is conditional upon custom. Trickery in the patriarchal narratives serves as a means for a person to achieve a goal in social relationships (Steinberg 1988:9–13). Here, trickery serves as a means to emancipate characters of a lowly position. Presumably Tamar was shaped by the worldview of her community, which led her to do well regardless of her circumstances.

In reviewing character ethics, using the Old Testament may pose some challenges. Some scholars have pointed out that the tradition does not hold ground in terms of moral theory (Haddorff 1996:49). A focus on ethics of character prevents the use of principles and rules that are connected to norms. Therefore, a challenge to character ethics is that it is not practical. As pointed out previously, Hauerwas (1972:698 & 699) argues for a uniform character. Another challenge to this approach is that a focus on narrative inclines towards group centeredness, which may lead to seclusion from Christian ethics in society (Haddorff 1996:49 & 50). Narratives are told within a community of believers, but are criticised for being too isolated and exclusivist in that the public sphere can hardly serve as a platform for conversation. Furthermore, ethics of character means that ethics begins with the embodiment of theological convictions, which is an important stance in ethical thinking; however, a focus on virtues makes the importation of ethical thinking a challenge because it is difficult to create principles to make virtues in narrative practical (Haddorff 1996:49). Furthermore, in ethics of character the social environment of Christians is hardly considered. According to this view, belief should take preference over society, which is not in dispute but can be somewhat prejudicial (Albrecht 1992:98). Character, therefore, may not be a plausible theory in terms of using the Old Testament in Christian ethics – which is why Birch and Rasmussen (1989b:322–332) argue for a look at community. In contrast to a focus on character, a focus on community might be more convincing because it necessitates that models in the community are required to promote character formation (Haddorff 1996:50).

#### **4.5.2 *The community in Genesis 38***

Christian ethical living relates to communal living (Birch & Rasmussen 1989a:67 & 68). The text can therefore serve to inform ethical thinking regarding community. This section deals with the narrative with regard to an ethics of community. Here the text is used as a source that can inform

Christians on ethical living in community. As mentioned a number of times in this study, it is difficult to use texts from the Old Testament in Christian ethics. A focus on community is relevant in the discussion as it seems best to discuss a text from the Old Testament by looking at it through the lens of community. This approach allows one to establish what Christians have in common with the community in the text in terms of their moral attitudes and interests. As discussed in the previous section, an ethics of character may not hold ground when using the Genesis 38 narrative but character can also be influenced by the social group to which people belong.

It is also important to establish what influence the community of faith has on the behaviour of the person. Community ethics may be a better option as opposed to character ethics. Timmer (2009:15 & 16) argues that life is all about relationships and people learn through their relationships with others. As a result, through learning, people are changed by their experiences. In terms of ethics of community, Birch and Rasmussen (1989a:67–69) concentrate on community by looking at what promotes character formation and moral conduct. They argue that biblical texts can play a significant role in Christian ethics if they are considered in the context of community. Community, in this sense, refers to a social group of people who share a religion, have a similar worldview, and have common interests and attitudes; character refers to how people understand themselves as moral beings; and community refers to how people relate socially. With regard to ethics in biblical narrative and early Christianity, the term “community” is revered because community is the counterpart of character, which is the integration of the person with the worldview of the social group (Cahill 2002:7).

It is clear from the narrative that although a person can serve his or her own interest, at times it may be best to consider the interest of the group. To take Judah as an example, there seems to be nothing wrong with his behaviour. In current thinking, he may come across as a caring father who attempts to

protect his last son from death. However, in terms of his society, it was expected of him to adhere to custom and that was the acceptable thing to do. But neither Judah nor Tamar is condemned in the narrative. For this reason, Judah admits at the end of the narrative that she is more righteous than him and by doing so, he admits that his behaviour towards her was wrong. Thus, he is not making a moral judgement but rather makes a statement in relation to the custom (Davidson 1979:230). He acknowledges that in withholding his son from Tamar, he denied her right to prosperity within the community and brought about a sad and shameful result. Considering Judah's societal position, one can argue that it is not prevalent that a patriarch admits that he is wrong.

At times, it is difficult to understand the behaviour of Judah and Tamar; however, in the narrative the means of achieving the objective is not the focus but rather the result (Esau 2006:4–10). Birch (1991:23) asserts that the answer to this problem lies within the text itself. Biblical interpretation may help us to better grasp the text, but meaning itself can be found in its social context. He argues that the communities in the Old Testament texts served to bring people in “relationship with the character, activity and will of God” (Birch 1991:23). Therefore, texts served as literature that shaped moral character and behaviour in relation to God. It is also important to consider that texts are theological; therefore, ethicists consider the religious meaning of a text before focusing on its ethical significance. For the most part, theology forms the basis for biblical interpretation and is therefore not necessarily an unswerving font for interpretation (Martens 1996:5 & 6). While theology is helpful to gain an understanding of biblical texts, it mainly “represents human understanding of what the Bible declares” (Martens 1996:5 & 6). In addition, current social surroundings have a direct influence on the way Christians interpret biblical texts (Martens 1996:7). Nevertheless, a focus on the origin of the text gives one a better understanding of issues that seemingly do not make sense within the narrative because the stories in the Old Testament can be difficult to

comprehend. The ethicist has various options when deciding on which method to use. A prominent feature of this community is that “being and doing” is captured in the “language of character and conduct” (Birch 1991:23). Furthermore, moral agents are people who interact with an ongoing history within a community in which language plays an important role. Birch (1991:24) argues that biblical ethics in the Old Testament cannot be differentiated from biblical theology. There is thus a linkage between ethics in the Old Testament and its theological witness.

The more favourable means, therefore, to deal with Christian ethics in the Old Testament is through the concept of community (Birch 1991:25). A focus on the community will inform views on the context of the text and its significance as a source of moral authority. Every text is part of a particular social context and ethics cannot be extracted and secluded from the community. Birch (1991:36) cautions that the “laws in the Pentateuch cannot be reduced to sociological evidence” in order to create structure for the patriarchs. At this point, it should be mentioned that the community of Israel gave theological preference to the revelation of the will of God as the key factor in morality.

One could argue that as a community of faith, Christians can relativise the narrative of Genesis 38 to inform ideas on how they ought to treat each other as part of a community of believers. It could further be argued that in all probability, the patriarchs were part of a community who shared a common worldview, values and attitudes that bound them together socially (Mills 2001:16 & 17). Tamar’s behaviour resulted from her being part of this community, where certain behaviour was expected in that cultural practices had to be upheld. The fact that members of the community shared a history makes it easier to grasp the widespread actions of the characters (Birch & Rasmussen 1989a:67–69).

Therefore, Christians can use certain ideas on how to live an ethical life from the text. It would appear that it is best to compare the similarities and differences between the worldview of the contemporary community of believers and those of the community narrated in Genesis 38 (Loewen 2000:7). People learn much from the society that they are part of. Within contemporary society, people learn certain values and principles that are important for their own survival within society. Most people identify with the social group that they are part of because it gives them a sense of identity (Loewen 2000:8; Akangbe 2012:27). Consequently, what is learned within the community serves as a guide to rationality and behaviour; it serves as a point of reference for the way people conduct themselves within society (Akangbe 2012:27 & 28). The Old Testament can therefore be a relevant source to inform Christians on ethical matters.

However, despite this unique opportunity, this cannot be achieved without the interpreter encountering a few difficulties. Christians have their own concerns and questions about prominent matters in current society and they approach biblical texts with these in mind. Biblical texts also belong to a particular context and culture, and are thus applied within a certain social context (Akangbe 2012:22). Hence, it is integral to consider the interface between the current social environment and the social context of the text in the process of interpretation (Akangbe 2012:22). The main purpose of the interpreter or ethicist is to find a link between the two cultures without changing the meaning of the text during transmission (Akangbe 2012:22). Culture also plays a significant role in the way people live and how they behave (Akangbe 2012:27).

An important question to consider is how to manage responsible interaction between two societies? To put it differently, how do Christians prevent misinterpretation of the response of the narrative to certain ethical issues that people face in current society? In the discussion, ethics of character and



ethics of community have raised acute awareness that we deal with a patriarchal society in the text.

#### **4.6 The feminist challenge**

The feminist tradition has the capacity to enable one to gain an accurate and deeply intuitive understanding of patriarchy within the text. It is therefore essential that the feminist stance be taken into consideration. The feminist approach is used in this study to gain the necessary insight into gender issues within the narrative. By using the feminist approach, the aim is not to contend that there is power abuse within the narrative of Genesis 38 but rather to understand gender relationships within the text. The social context of Judah and Tamar is situated within a patriarchal society. Judah is a patriarch. When using the feminist approach, one can argue that this behaviour was accepted in this society because of the assumption that women did not have the same rights as men (Wildavsky 1994:41–48). However, if one allows the narrative to interpret itself, it counters this argument.

A feminist approach raises awareness of how the roles of men and women have changed in present society (Rogerson 2001:38). The challenge may be to use the text as a model for sexual relations to focus on matters that people are currently facing. It would be easy to assume that the text addresses the issue of power abuse. To support this argument, one could posit that the text concerns social relationships – but this is a false assumption. Gerstenberger (2002:31) alerts us to the fact that adult members of the family were equally important for the survival of the community. The only authority that had to be answered to was the deity outside and above the family which seemed important and also necessary in the community.

Genesis 38 is based on a familial context in which offspring was the pivotal focus (Cahill 1985:83–104). It is clear from the narrative that patriarchy was the norm. In focusing on the story, feminists may alert us to the issues of injustice and oppression within the text. But Wenham (2000:2) argues that an understanding of the historical background of the narrative would point out that the levirate law served to protect the deceased Er and not principally Tamar. A feminist approach essentially focuses on the way women experience life, thus the same approach might be taken with reference to the narrative (Goldingay 2011:277).

A danger of this approach is that one should not only interpret the text from a gender perspective (Van Wolde 1997:1 & 2). The narrative is about the levirate duty, which is a male-protecting law (Niditch 2012:45). Therefore, the narrative mainly served this purpose. Tamar acts (Gen 38:13–19) as the devoted wife of her deceased husband, which is the behaviour expected of her. The aim of the levirate law was to perpetuate the name of the dead husband in order to ensure that he had descendants in the afterlife. In the process, the widow was also protected by the law as it ensured that she did not suffer economic deprivation because she would have a son to fend for her (Niditch 2012:45). Although the narrative can be used to address the notion of power abuse, one should be cautious not to make this a focus when finding ethical meaning in the text. Hence, it is important to understand the context and community of the text.

#### **4.7 More difficulties when using Genesis 38 in Christian ethics**

According to Albrecht (1992:98), a look at character and community might show resistance to current views on gender. This may be because close-knit communities tend to be exclusive in that they exclude outsiders or because of the danger that people are formed within those communities, which direct thinking in a particular way. As part of a social group, a person may simply

conform to the practices of the group that can lead to prejudice (Albrecht 1992:99). The important question here is what perspective does community give the individual about their society? More importantly, if the character of a person is shaped by the tradition of the group, what happens to behaviour outside of the social grouping when there is no guidance for the individual? Conformity necessarily means the embodiment of good character because it is easy to comply with the rules and conventions of a group. Another problem is that behaviour may become too traditionalist in that a person may uphold tradition in order to resist any change in the broader society.

It could be argued that a traditionalist may find it difficult to operate individually and this can be a recipe for irresponsibility. Moreover, when people become a part of a certain group, they may embody the character of their social group but what kind of character is the focus at this juncture? In terms of Genesis 38, the character of Tamar is not developed (Waltke & Fredericks 2001:508 & 509). The narrator does not judge her behaviour, but leaves moral judgement to the reader (Scullion 1992:299). Therefore, the fact that Tamar protected her place in the society makes her a person of virtue (Anderson 1993:34 & 35). It allows one to consider what a person will do for the survival of his or her people (Wildavsky 1994:37–39).

Character in community can pose a problem for gender in terms of it being exclusive, whereas a character that is formed within a community can challenge the person to be an individual. These are some of the challenges that Christians face in the process of interpreting biblical texts. However, one could assert that it is the duty of Christians, in every time and place, to understand the society that they are part of in order to make sense of the moral circumstances they face (Jerslid 1990:9–14). The early Christians had similar challenges, which led to Christians having a better understanding of the biblical texts today. This may never have been possible if they did not grapple to incorporate Christian writings with their social environment. An

important observation is that it seems that the text does not make sense without a concise understanding of the connection between ethics and culture. It is obvious that the various approaches in Christian ethics themselves present certain challenges. The only way that the reader of the text can respond to the various challenges is with clear insight not only into the ethics and culture in the text, but also into the world of the reader.

#### **4.8 Connecting the world of the text with the world of the interpreter**

It would appear that there is an intrinsic connection between ethics and culture not only in the text, but also in the society that the reader is part of. It is important to note that culture in this sense has a dual meaning; it refers to the culture of the patriarchs and is also integral to the social environment of the interpreter (Sprintzen 2009:1–9). The narrative gives a clear explanation of people and their actions that take place within a particular community or society. Therefore, the circumstances surrounding the narrative should be treated in this manner.

Birch (1991:153 & 154) argues that morality in the Old Testament refers to the social surroundings of community identity. Thus biblical texts are an account of the way in which this identity is shaped. He further argues that community in the Old Testament is responsible for the formation of its own members. This is done in various ways and the narratives in biblical texts can also play an essential role. It is important to take into account that these texts do not bring about ethical decisions for the interpreter but instead offer examples of norms and principles against which Christians can assess their own moral conduct when confronted with moral dilemmas. Hauerwas (1981:9–35) asserts that the moral life of a person is not separate from his or her community. In his view, a person who is not bound to the community will struggle to recognise who or what he or she is and to find an alternative to establishing uniqueness. It

would appear that Hauerwas and Birch are in agreement about the effectiveness of community in Christian ethics.

However, although some scholars are in favour of an ethics of community, others (such as Webb 2001:22) point out that current society presents the individual with its own unique challenges. Christians have to decide how to combine the values and ideas of their community of faith with those of their society and culture. Hall (1996:134) argues that religious beliefs raise awareness of the capabilities and duties of individuals. In addition, people often measure what they consider right or wrong in terms of their religious beliefs and practices. What is more, in some cases, there is often tension between ethics and religious beliefs as people struggle to prioritise their own moral concerns. Nevertheless, religion can increase meaning and purpose in a person's life and this can bring about social change. It is therefore important that the individual decide whether to approve the various changes within current society or to contest them. But how should the Christian deal with the modifications in current society? Webb (2001:22) argues that where culture departs from teachings that are not in line with Christian values, Christians should challenge their culture (meaning those values that surpass culture and time). This can be determined in terms of unfavourable matters in society as well as matters that concern justice, here the stance of the Christian should be easy to perceive.

A challenge to Christianity is that today people in society are not so much group orientated. Thus Hauerwas (1972:698 & 699), who prefers a focus on community, opposes the fact that people are encouraged to make their own decisions and have their own ideas of what makes life meaningful, which lead to freedom of choice and action. Hauerwas (1972:698 & 699) does agree that Christians should follow the same path. Their community religion shapes Christian thinking and conduct. Therefore, while individuals in society are encouraged to determine their own destiny, outlook on life and measure for

personal ethical living, the Christian would feel lost if he or she is disconnected from his or her community. Individuals have the option to make moral decisions in terms of the alternatives that society or the world offers them. For the Christian, ethics is ultimately expressed within society (Carro 1997:411 & 412). It is, however, a challenge to separate culture and ethics because culture comprises values that are upheld by the majority in the group and therefore the decisions of the group are linked to these values (Hunter 2010:6–9). This makes it difficult to re-appropriate a narrative such as the one of Judah and Tamar in terms of the identified approaches in Christian ethics.

#### **4.8.1 *The narrative in current society***

The interpreter will use the text to address current issues within his or her society. A concern that Carro (1997:411) raises is that ethics is influenced by culture. It may accordingly be argued that moral principles improve within a cultural milieu.

As societies change, the worldview of people also changes with time. Although the text may appear to deal with trials and tribulations experienced within the family of Judah and Tamar, it is essential to take into account that the worldview that is portrayed in the text is vastly different from the social context of the reader. For example, the levirate duty as a cultural practice was important enough to allow for trickery and deception in the text. However, before one jumps to ethical conclusions, one has to consider the underlying message of the text for a specific group of people, namely that the well-being of the community is central under the circumstances. It would appear that the author conveyed a message in a way that the community of Judah and Tamar would understand, constantly transform and look for better ways to live. The challenge with this narrative is that the attitudes surrounding the concept of trickery are unclear. Scholars have various explanations for the role of trickery, but it is difficult to grasp the stance of the community in the text on the

matter. As a result, it is also difficult to determine the kind of people portrayed in the patriarchal narratives due to their various delinquencies (Esau 2006:4–7).

Ethics in Genesis 38 can be understood as the well-being of the people that depended on how well members of the community were shaped by tradition. Even though we approach the text with our own concerns and questions, it is important to link what the text meant in Israelite culture in the past and what it means for Christian ethics today (Clines 1997:9). Surely, every person has the right to choose within which interpretive framework to operate, hence the argument that the focus should be on how text and ethicist can interact to create meaning that makes it relevant for current interpretation (Clines 1997:10).

Huebner (2012:4) points out that “ethics, whether it is personal or social, is the expression of the good” that is conveyed within a certain culture, which is acquired when people interact socially with each other. This is also applicable to the biblical text. Moreover, culture is important for the interaction between “reason, experience and tradition” in order to learn from society the quality of being good. As readers, we are influenced by our own social setting and culture; therefore, in the process of interpretation, there is bound to be a connection between the social setting of the text and the social circumstances of the reader (Akangbe 2012:22). People need a sense of social grouping in order to acquire the skills that are necessary for ethical living. The issue, therefore, is how to connect the social setting of the text with current society and culture. Here, the ethicist has to identify the moral system in the text (Barton 2003:25–28). In doing this, it is his or her task to initiate suggestions for a possible course of action to relate the text and society.

Although scholars have developed a number of methods to help us gain a better understanding of biblical texts, it is difficult to conceptualise culture

(Akangbe 2012:26). Loewen (2000:7) opines that culture is described as that which permits a person to know how to live. People do not have a natural predisposition to endure in their social environment; they have to learn how to survive. They do so through the progressions and processes in their society. Culture nurtures people's thinking and behaviour in society. Within the aforementioned, people live out their religious convictions. Accordingly, culture also informs much of what people consider to be acceptable or unacceptable.

It can also be argued that culture empowers people to live and equips them with the tools that are essential for them to survive in society (Loewen 2000:8). Furthermore, it determines how a person fits into a certain place and environment. It creates a framework for the way in which people contemplate, evaluate and behave in life. In addition, it gives people an underlying basis for principles to make rational judgements and to behave. Another factor is that culture provides a representation of things as they really exist, as opposed to an idealistic idea of them (Loewen 2000:13 & 14). It informs people, for example, on whether men and women have the same status within society. It consists of different forms that are the result of cultural contact (Loewen 2000:9 & 10).

Culture is such a part of people that elements of it can be traced in everyday mannerisms (Akangbe 2012:26 & 27). Individuals grow up in a particular society in which they learn values and principles to lead them later in life. But there is bound to be resistance between the individual and the community. The individual may find it difficult to relate the fundamentals of his or her life (such as standards, virtues and values) to traditions that are significant in his or her society (Huebner 2012:4). As traditions are transmitted from one generation to another, the preceding generation has the responsibility to determine the contextual implications of events and to establish their life-sustaining properties in order for them to be re-used (Huebner 2012:4). In doing this, it is important to determine the role of ethics in society (Huebner



2012:173 & 174). It is therefore imperative to consider whether ethics shape society or whether it is the other way around. Moreover, if ethics contribute to shaping society, it plays an important role in society. Culture gives us an idea of how social reality has changed and what difference it has made for the moral identity of society in general and for the individual specifically (Huebner 2012:173 & 174).

#### **4.8.2 *Pluralism in society***

Christian ethicists contemplate how Christians should envisage and live a moral life within their faith community and the world. The Christian life is not merely about going to church and participating in church activities; they form part of a world that is not particularly Christian and does not necessarily have the same value system. Conversely, as a community of worship, Christians do not live in seclusion from their societies and cultures. Pluralism is thus an important factor to keep in mind in this discussion. The challenge is that Christians are not isolated from their communities and are not remote from cultures, hence discourse between cultures are required (Cahill 2002:5 & 6). Pluralism acknowledges different cultures but argues that the experiences of human beings are similar, which eradicates any biological difference and lead people to engage in conversation with each other (Barton 2003:19–25). Therefore, the experience of a character in a narrative fits into the same setting.

Pluralism also exists within texts as various theologies are present within a text (Spohn 1984:3). Hauerwas (1974:48–50) opines that character is shaped in the Christian community and should remain the responsibility of the church as a social entity. Birch (1991:23–30) argues for an ethics of community from a stance of Biblical Criticism which poses that in Christian ethics texts should not only be explained in sociological terms because texts are theological. In other words, texts can only be useful in the community of believers.

However, Clines (1993:76) argues that biblical texts are not reserved for the use of the church only; they are what he calls “common cultural property” and therefore the biblical interpreter should always consider the religious plurality of society. Pluralism refers to the view that there should be room for multiple ideas for living a good life in society (Goodman 2012:462). Huebner (2012:462) points out that society consists of people with various traditions. Different traditions are required because through dialogue with others, people learn to improve their own beliefs in order for it to perpetuate (Huebner 2012:4).

Any society comprises those who are accountable for the expansion or malfunction of it, whether situated in a text or in current society (Mills 2001:18 & 19). Moreover, when a person becomes a part of a group, he or she accepts the worldview of the people who belong to that group. As a community of believers, Christians can relativise Genesis 38 for current use by learning the importance of treating each other justly within their society. Christians can also take and use the narrative for current use to learn about group relations. For the most part, communities share a history that makes it easier to grasp the widespread actions of its members (Birch & Rasmussen 1989a:67–69).

Furthermore, Christians can look at the different cultures of the Old Testament through the eyes of the patriarchs. Different cultures interacted with each other in the world of the text (Akangbe 2012:28). Similarly, in the contemporary world, there are various views and different ideas about social reality (Montague 2007:6). Every culture has its own story, principles and concerns for current society. The focus of the contemporary world is more on the narrative of another culture than engaging in insincere arguments with it. Each culture has its own narrative to tell. Moreover, as soon as people perceive the meaning of the views another culture holds, they may feel inclined to make partial changes to their own views. Therefore, people can

learn from the biblical text ways to improve their own community. Therefore, it could be argued that it is important to look for ways to address the relationship between ethics and culture.

#### **4.9 The role of biblical interpretation in Christian ethics**

Ogletree (2003:1) argues that the “direct link between ethics and culture is Christian ethics and biblical scholarship”. In a discussion about the relationship between ethics and culture, it is important to find the connection between Christian ethics and biblical interpretation (Fowl & Jones 1991:1–3). How Christians use the Old Testament in Christian ethics is related to the interpretation of the text. By interpreting the text, one attempts to subtract meaning from it. Different methods of interpretative practice are applied to do this (Fowl 2006:379). Furthermore, each method has a theory that determines meaning and how it is attained. It is not easy to make sense of the societies in biblical texts. To do this involves intensive study of the theology or religion of Israel, which can be more useful if it is done through biblical interpretation. The central task is to establish with reference to biblical texts the qualities and conduct that are in line with being called the people of God. In addition, it is important to determine how believers should live in relation to fellow believers and the broader society.

The purpose of ethical analysis and examination is to comprehend moral encounters in terms of them having the capacity to develop one and lead to future usefulness (Ogletree 2003:1). Therefore, if the Old Testament is to be useful in Christian ethics, interpreters have to find ways to relate to the narratives of the people portrayed within the stories in order for them to influence the contemporary world. In the discussion about the ethical approaches to interpreting texts, it became clear that it is integral to know what the text meant in the past in order to use it in the present. In this regard, biblical interpretation plays an important role. Christians turn to biblical texts

when they have moral concerns because they consider the Bible an authority on such matters (Ogletree 2003:1 & 2). It is therefore important to take into account the role of Biblical Criticism because interpreters need to make sense of biblical texts that were transmitted orally in a previous era, a different language and to an ancient people called Israel (Arndt 2011:3–5). As has already been established in this study, both a literary-critical approach and a historical-critical approach can be useful to gain a better understanding about the text (Kawashima 2012:83).

Cahill (2002:15) argues that biblical interpretation is crucial to Christian ethics if Christians want to use biblical texts for ethical formation. For Christians, texts relate to their own existence in that it defines them as free and responsible for their own development. It also gives believers numerous options for moral living in contemporary society (Ogletree 2003:2 & 3). As Christians engage critically with texts in terms of morality, the aim is to gain a better understanding of their own beliefs and convictions (Ogletree 2003:3).

In this sense, biblical interpretation can play an important role if one has to relate ethics to culture within a text. It is a “specialised function of the universal human search for meaning in a text and the text that is itself someone else’s (the biblical writer’s) interpretation” of one or more events or traditions or texts (Montague 2007:12). Through interpretation, people can determine what the text is saying. Consequently, the reader not only has access to various tools in an attempt to find the meaning of a text, but also helps to determine whether a text makes any claim on the life of a person (Montague 2007:vi). While Barton (2003:23–25) points out that Christians have no idea what the author’s intention is, Montague (2007:4) asks whether “the reader is capable of finding more meaning in the text than the author put there”. This results in the presupposition of whether interpretation is specific or whether the reader has the right to decide how to make sense of the text. Therefore, it could be

pointed out that the interpreter can help to make sense of the text by using the methods that have been developed by biblical scholars.

#### **4.10 Challenges in interpretation**

The link between the literary-critical approach and the historical-critical approach can be useful. It is important to note that biblical interpretation is not without its problems. Some challenges can be pointed out when linking biblical material to ethics (Cahill 2002:15). The biggest obstacle that the ethicist faces is that using the ethics in the Pentateuch is difficult (Birch 2007:338–347). Although a historical or literary approach to Genesis 38 is helpful, it still does not solve interpretation issues. In addition, a difficulty of reading Genesis is to determine what characters in the text “do not know, but readers do know, because the narrator tells them (us)” (Carr 2013:35). In this sense, the relationship between the historical-critical approach and the literary-critical approach is important. The challenge is to establish how the two inform one another (Kawashima 2012:83–90). This study is also aimed at addressing this challenge in biblical interpretation. Both approaches can be useful with regard to Genesis 38. A historical approach can help to determine not only the context within which the text originated, but also what is meant by the levirate duty; while trickery can be better understood in terms of literary art (Rogerson 2001:38–40).

Where ethics are concerned, some features of the patriarchal narratives are not responsive to suggestions that they are located in a particular historical period (Barton 2003:25). This has led scholars to doubt whether the patriarchs actually existed. Although the existence of the patriarchs is not a primary concern in this study, it would have made the task of interpretation easier as it is not clear what the patriarchs believed about trickery (Barton 2003:26). Where biblical texts are concerned, the writer may expect the reader to approve of trickery because of the purpose it served, “or to disapprove

deception but consider the mystery of God who can bring good out of evil, or to be amused and intrigued but pass no moral judgement” (Barton 2003:27 & 28). The problem is that it is unclear what the writer intended in the first place, which makes it difficult to draw conclusions or make general statements about the ethics in the patriarchal narratives. A focus on the literary features of the text can help to determine what literary content is present in the narrative and what purpose it served within its social context. Another difficulty may be to find the connection between ethics and the social setting because it is difficult to find a link between the text and the interpreter (Clines 1997:10–12).

The ethicist therefore has to find a bridge between Christian ethics and biblical interpretation. Take the idea of community for example: in biblical narrative, community refers to the people who are portrayed in the text (Mills 2001:16 & 17). The narrator is an important figure in the narrative because as the storyteller, he or she relates the narrative to the reader – which was the patriarchs in the past and is now current believers. If Wenham (2000:1–4) is correct in arguing that the text is the message of the author to the readers, surely there is a distance between time and space and between author and reader. What this means is that the interpreter may struggle to grasp the true meaning of the text. Despite the reasons that Wenham advances for his argument, it remains difficult to ascertain the moral judgement of the storyteller concerning the actions of the characters in Genesis 38 (Steinberg 1993:115–120).

Here language plays an integral part. Every society has its own structure to transfer information or traditions (Dueck 2012:116). Words have different meanings in different societies. A problem with the setting of Genesis is that the texts were probably orated in Hebrew and the language itself may have developed over time (Hendel 2012:70). By the time that it was written down, the meaning of the language may have changed. It has become clear during this study that language is important in the process of interpretation. The

justice in Genesis 38 refers to behaviour that conforms to the responsibility which cultural practices place on the community, which judges make judgements on based on biblical law (Malchow 1996:16 & 17). As I previously pointed out, justice in the narratives of the patriarchs refer to relational duty.

Current concepts of trickery and deception also differ from what it meant in the time of the story. Today people might consider deception to be unethical; it can also refer to a person misbehaving in a particular way. Yet trickery is a common occurrence in the patriarchal narratives. Trickery is found in the narratives about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Niditch 2012:38). Although narrative critics have pointed out that trickery serves a particular purpose within the patriarchal narratives (for example to address the ills of hierarchy with the stories), the current interpreter still has a different understanding of the concept. Nevertheless, biblical texts in the Old Testament can be used because today numerous methods can be used to deal with the challenges the text may present to interpretation. According to Barton (1996:19), it is important to acknowledge that Biblical Criticism has advanced the way in which people think about biblical texts. Through Biblical Criticism, the modern reader can acquire the competence that is necessary to read a narrative such as that of Judah and Tamar and to use the text as a source of ethics.

#### **4.11 Conclusion**

This chapter began with a description of the narrative in Genesis 38 and then continued with an explanation of the text. The narrative was examined according to the methods developed by biblical scholars. This provided a picture of the usefulness of the narrative of Judah and Tamar and the challenges that arise when the text is used in Christian ethics. It is clear that no matter how advanced tools in Biblical Criticism may seem and how useful approaches in Christian ethics may be, there will always be gaps in interpretation. Although it is important to note that there are various problems

in biblical texts, the different methods of analysis and/or interpretation can be used to address these problems. The fundamental role of the interpreter is to provide a link between Biblical Criticism and Christian ethics in order to look for ways to address the problems. This in turn confirms that the link between ethics and culture is intricate and that there is a need to focus on this. The chapter concluded by emphasising that in order to use a text in the Old Testament for ethical formation, it is essential to establish the relationship between Christian ethics and biblical interpretation.



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

Christians claim that the Bible is their source for ethical living, but using biblical texts are difficult. This study was aimed at providing answers for the inconsistencies that arise when using the Bible in Christian ethics. It can be argued that the narratives in the Bible relate to human experience. Whether or not the characters that are portrayed in the narratives actually existed is open to discussion. However, Christians nevertheless use the Bible as a resource for moral formation.

In contributing to current discussions on the subject, the difficulty of using a text in the Old Testament as a source of Christian ethics was put forward. In order to use the Bible – or more specifically the Old Testament – in Christian ethics, it is important to focus on the relationship between ethics and culture. The results of the study revealed that in the process of interpretation, two worlds have to meet: the social world of the text and the world of the interpreter. When focusing on Genesis 38, it is clear that there is a fundamental difference between past and current connotations of certain terms in the narrative, for example prostitution and trickery. As biblical scholars have explained, prostitution contributed to fertility. Trickery, as Niditch (2012:27–45) explains, can be seen as a narrative tool that served to elevate a person of low standing from oppression. The interpreter has to take all these connotations into consideration when he or she uses a biblical text for ethical formation. More importantly, current society has its own challenges and people have numerous sources that function as guides for moral living, for example culture. It is therefore essential to take the relationship between ethics and culture into consideration in this discussion. Culture provides support for ideas about values and principles for living in any given society. This is also important to bear in mind when using biblical texts.

In establishing the groundwork for this study, the problems that the narrative might present to current understandings of the text were addressed in chapter 2. These problems include trickery and prostitution. The chapter provided a picture of the living conditions of the patriarchs. The intent was to look at the culture that is portrayed in the patriarchal narratives. The methods that have been developed within Biblical Criticism, and how each method can serve as a tool for explaining the narratives of the patriarchs, were also discussed. An important element of studying the ancestors is to look at the book of Genesis. Hence, in this study, it was important to determine where Genesis fits into the Old Testament. The overall structure of the book was explained, as well as the place of the patriarchal narratives and the function of Genesis 38 within the book. In order to understand the events in Genesis 38, it was imperative to see how biblical scholars have shed light on some of the concerns in the text. Thus, an overview of Genesis helped to place the text into perspective.

The historical-critical approach was used to look at the narrative of the text in terms of the purpose of the writers. Here the writers provided a means to understand the text (Thiselton 2009:20–27). Thus it is essential to consider the text in terms of place and time as texts were written for a particular audience in a particular time and place. At this point, it is important to mention that Genesis 38 was written for a particular community, which presumably understood the intention of the author. The theme of the promise of offspring was pointed out as being important in the patriarchal narratives. Accordingly, the concept of the levirate duty correlates with this theme. Throughout the study, it was explained that the levirate law ensured the perpetuation of the community. Therefore, it can be argued that the levirate law contributed to the survival of the community of Judah and Tamar (Brueggemann 1982:307). This might also be the reason why trickery and deception are present in the text. Trickery was further examined according to the literary-critical approach. In this sense, narrative criticism was useful as it provided insight into trickery and deception as a common occurrence in the ancestral narratives. It became

clear that trickery can be seen as a literary device that served a specific function within the narratives. The deception, however, did not call for moral judgement but rather allowed Tamar to fulfil her levirate duty.

Besides looking at the time and place of the patriarchal narratives and the purpose of trickery, another important component of the study was the social setting of the narratives. Here interdisciplinary approaches were used to understand the text in terms of the original audience in order to direct current use of the texts by faith communities. In doing this, the aim was to determine the theological meaning of the narrative and to understand the social world that gave rise to it. The intent was to look at the different aspects of society that are not mentioned in the texts but which were important elements in the social world from which the narratives emerged. Ultimately, certain features of a possible culture could be identified within the text. By focusing on culture, the way in which the patriarchs informed and gave meaning to life, as well as the various ways to perpetuate it, could be determined. Concepts such as “family”, “levirate law”, “community” and “religion” were central to the discussion. The investigation of the different concepts enabled an analysis of the narrative with a view to establishing its intrinsic worth and possible usefulness. If the narrative is understood in terms of the different methods, the interpreter is allowed to establish the relative importance of unspecified circumstances within Genesis 38 which was useful for the task of interpretation in Christian ethics.

Therefore, chapter 3 focused on Christian ethics. To support the main argument, three key influences in the development of Christian ethics were discussed. These can be identified as the early church, philosophy and the Bible. Each contributed to how Christian ethics is viewed today. Christianity developed through various phases. Throughout its development, believers faced certain challenges within their own societies. In terms of the early Christians, it could be argued that besides biblical interpretation, the

integration of ethics and society was a concern. The early believers were surrounded by people from different belief systems (Tarnas 1991:106–119). It can be argued that the early Christians were oppressed, hence the challenge in their walk of faith. Despite the fact that they were being oppressed, they struggled to follow the teachings in biblical texts in their social environment. Therefore, it can be argued that it was essential for believers to form a particular identity as Christians. In other words, members could be recognised by the way in which they had to act. It is therefore evident that developments within a given society influence ethical living and the way in which people make sense of biblical narratives.

Although Christians today do not experience the same problems as the early Christians, society still poses certain challenges to using the biblical texts for ethical formation. Christians still have to find ways to improve life. Scholars such as Hauerwas as well as Birch and Rasmussen have attempted to inform thinking on the matter by focusing on ethics of character and ethics of community. Ethics of character concern how the individual can be shaped morally. Hauerwas (1974:48–67) has a more classic view of character in that he describes the term as that of having character or character traits but also how to be a character. He argues that narratives can play a significant role in the formation of character. Hauerwas (1974:65) emphasises that good people do not strive to obtain good character but rather focus on symbolising it. By looking at community, narratives can be useful to shape the Christian as belonging to a community of faith. Birch and Rasmussen (1989a:67 & 68) assert that one cannot gain an understanding of moral living apart from the community to which one belongs. They emphasise the fact that to be moral means that a person needs to attain intrinsic worth, but this is only possible if the individual partakes in communal life. A moral life, in this sense, is only obtainable in a community.

The challenge here is that with a focus on community in narrative, it may be difficult to integrate experiences in the narrative with current life circumstances. It is important to note that the narrative of Judah and Tamar has a patriarchal setting. The roles of men and women, in comparison to the narrative, have ostensibly changed. To this effect, it was important that the feminist view be taken into consideration. This approach was used in the study to acquire the required insight into issues related to gender and the narratives of the patriarchs. Gender roles in the patriarchal narratives can be described as the actions that are expected from men and women within a specific community, and may be different in another context. An exploration of some of the approaches in Christian ethics provided new angles to the use of the narrative. With reference to ethics of character, one can establish how individuals can inform their opinions about ethical living. Here the moral formation and moral self-expression of the person are important (Cahill 2002:3–17). In considering ethics of community, it can be argued that the narratives in the Old Testament contemplate a relationship in community with God (Birch 1991:17–23). The contemporary church, as a community of faith, has this in common. Narratives can therefore be seen as stipulating the vision for this relationship.

In chapter 4, the narrative of Judah and Tamar was examined as a central part of the study. This chapter began with a description of the narrative in Genesis 38 and continued with an explanation of the text. The narrative was discussed to provide an understanding of the methods used in Biblical Criticism. The fundamental purpose of the chapter was to bring together the methods of Biblical Criticism and the identified approaches in Christian ethics. The objective was to determine the usefulness of the text for Christian ethics. Biblical scholars have raised awareness of the fact that birthing a child was important in the social context of the text as the preservation of the community was pivotal (Davidson 1979:222–230). Although the intention of the author is unclear, trickery served an important function in ensuring that the levirate duty

was fulfilled (Barton 2003:23–25). An important point that Birch (1991:23–30) raises, is that meaning lies within the text itself; the text determines its own social context. It can therefore also be argued that the text determines its own ethics.

Genesis 38 deals with people and their actions in their community. The text is a story about a family that deals with the issues of the levirate duty (Fretheim 1994:602–607). To consider the notion of character, for example, a focus on character within the narrative is not feasible. This is because the characters of Judah and Tamar are not developed within the narrative. It could, however, be argued that the narrative clearly demonstrates the character of the community to which Judah and Tamar belonged. Consequently, ethics of community seemed more plausible because in the Old Testament ethics were informed by the theology of the distinctive social group. In this sense, it is best to deal with the text by looking at the issues with which it dealt at a given time. The narrative evidently reveals that the means of establishing the outcome is not a concern but rather a result.

It is clear that no matter how advanced the tools of Biblical Criticism and how useful approaches in Christian ethics are, there will always be gaps in interpretation. However, a look at the methods that have been developed by biblical scholars and ethicists shows that it is difficult to use the narratives in the Old Testament because of the difficult relationship between ethics and culture. This difficulty is partial to the fact that there is tension between ethics and culture not only in the text, but also in the world of the interpreter. It could be argued that there is therefore a need to focus on the perspective that Biblical Criticism can contribute to the study. By using the methods of Biblical Criticism, it was possible to get an idea of the social world of Genesis 38. The fundamental role was, however, to provide a link between Biblical Criticism and Christian ethics in order to look for ways to address the problem. Firstly, it was important to place the narrative within the context from which it emerged.

The focus was therefore on the social world of Genesis 38. Secondly, the intent was to determine what could be learned from the narrative about ethics of character and ethics of community.

In reflecting on the process of application and the appropriation of the text, it should be noted that a number of challenges are associated with using the ethical traditions in terms of the text. In considering the narrative, it appears that in the face of conventional thinking, the behaviour of both Judah and Tamar is problematic. For who commits adultery with one's father-in-law and is considered righteous in contemporary society? In this sense, the narrative can be a challenge to current ethical thinking. It is a fact that interpreters mirror their own circumstances in society when they read biblical texts (Rogerson 2001:40–41). At this juncture, it is important to point out that when using texts, both the social setting of the Old Testament and that of contemporary believers should be considered. Again, to consider the narrative, ethics are addressed within a particular cultural milieu. Christians, however, form part of a broader society (which also has the ability to persuade people with ideas about the kind of people individuals ought to be). It could therefore be argued that culture motivates ethics. In view of this, ethics are influenced by culture because moral standards advance within a cultural setting (Carro 1997:411). The behaviour of the individual is also shaped within society. Ethics, culture and social behaviour are closely linked. Each of these factors plays an imperative role in the formation of identity. The difficulty is to determine what demand each one makes on the other.

What is also important to mention is that in the process of interpretation, two worlds have to connect (Akangbe 2012:22). The task of the interpreter is to derive norms and ideas from texts, but biblical narratives contain a number of waywardness in mannerisms (Esau 2006:4–7). In reading any narrative in the Old Testament, it is inevitable that two cultures meet. The purpose of the interpreter is to establish the correlation between ethics and culture, and how

this influences Christian behaviour. As a main source of inquiry, a better understanding of the Bible is required but more specifically its place and use within Christian ethics. At this stage, it is important to point out that although approaches in both Biblical Criticism and Christian ethics have been helpful, each has its limitations because biblical texts reveal a pluralism of theologies (Knierim 1995:1 & 2). It appears that all the pluralities in the Old Testament should be considered because biblical texts are theological and when one reads a text, one is confronted with the theologies of every text in the Bible (Goldingay 1987:10). Therefore, texts are hardly considered in isolation from other texts. It is clear that the material in the Old Testament has a diverse range that is cause for concern to anyone who attempts to interpret biblical material.

Moreover, there are some discrepancies within biblical texts that may not give a clear portrayal of the patriarchs in terms of their theology, values and customs, or their outlook on life. These are factors that the interpreter has to take into consideration. If the narrative will be used to inform Christian ethics, the task is to determine what the narrative tries to say to the community. More importantly, how can a narrative that was written for a community that lived in a different time and place serve to inform Christians about ethics at present? It is my observation that the text can be useful when one takes into account the close connection between ethics and culture. In order to establish the culture in the text, one needs insight into the matter. The focus of this study was also on the contribution that approaches in Christian ethics can make. However, when we use the text to inform us about ethical living, the concepts of “character” and “community” have their boundaries: character is not properly developed within the narrative and community tend to be exclusive.

In considering the relationship between ethics and culture, it became clear from the study that there are certain boundaries between the ethical world of the interpreter and the ethical world of the text. These present certain



challenges. The challenges that are notable are oriented and connected to social relatedness, but each can provide insight into the tension between ethics and culture. As has already been established, the relationship between ethics and culture is not only external but also within the text. These two domains illustrate that it is not only what is done in Biblical Criticism and Christian ethics that is important, but also how these relate to the development of society.

It is important to be aware of these two worlds and to acquire the knowledge and skills that are needed to address both these domains when using the Old Testament in Christian ethics. Currently, all these methods and traditions exist, but it is a challenge to breach the gap between the current world and the world of the text. Methods and theories that have been developed within Biblical Criticism and Christian ethics should not go to waste because they can be useful. It is also important to consider that biblical texts have stimulated moral development in different social settings and periods. As is clear, already in early Christianity, people struggled to relate texts to the changes in society. This is no different today; there have been various changes in contemporary society. A further fact to note is that people continuously transform their behaviour and thinking, which changes their thought patterns about life. Subsequently, new ways are found to express opinions on matters that concern present-day society. Given that the main interest is to use the Old Testament, it should be pointed out that if the texts are viewed as an authoritative source of ethics, it is important to establish its role in Christian ethics. It appears that a starting point may be to take into consideration the role of ethics and culture.

In order to address this issue, it is important to establish – through methods of Biblical Criticism – how to address issues that exist amid the moral conduct and culture in biblical texts. Secondly, tools that have been developed by biblical scholars can serve to advance one's knowledge of the social

surroundings/environment of the text; therefore it should be considered in interpretation. However, it is reasonable to argue that the process of interpretation is strenuous and a lot of effort is required to apply the text in ethical formation. Conceivably, it is time to consider the importance of the relationship between Biblical Criticism and Christian ethics.

I conclude this study by highlighting the fact that in order to use the text for ethical formation, it is essential to establish the relationship between Christian ethics and biblical interpretation. The interpreter can be the one who draws the limits of a text in order to ensure understanding and the applicability of the Old Testament in Christian ethics. Future studies that might help in this could concentrate on easier ways to use the Old Testament in Christian ethics. But at this stage, it is important to emphasise the mutual benefits of Biblical Criticism and the approaches in Christian ethics that can be beneficial when using the Old Testament as a source of ethical formation. Research has much to gain from the interaction between Biblical Criticism and Christian ethics. It is therefore imperative that a way is found to balance a conceptual connection between the methods of both fields in order to ensure backing that can contribute to the use of the Old Testament. Whatever balance is maintained can contribute to using narratives to responsibly engage in ethical matters within current society.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adar, Z. 1990. *The Book of Genesis: An Introduction to the Biblical World*. Jerusalem: Magness Press.
- Akangbe, F. 2012. Scripture and Culture: Interplay of Influence. *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* 17 (2):21-36.
- Albrecht, G.H. 1992. Myself and Other Characters: A Feminist Liberationist Critique of Hauerwas's Ethics of Christian Character. *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, NV:97–114.
- Alexander, T.D. 2002. *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*. London: Paternoster Press & Baker Academic.
- Alt, A. 1989. *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*. Sheffield: JSOT Press.
- Alter, R. 1992. *The World of Biblical Literature*. New York: Basic Books.
- Alter, R. 1996. *Genesis: Translation and Commentary*. New York: Norton & Company.
- Amit, Y. 2001. *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress.
- Amit, Y. 2009. Narrative Literature, in *The New Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible Me–R*, edited by K.D. Sakenfeld. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press:223–225.
- Amit, Y. 2011. Hidden Polemics in the Story of Judah and Tamar, in *A Critical Engagement: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of J Cheryl Exum*, edited by D.J.A. Clines & E. van Wolde. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press:1–20.
- Anderson, R. 1993. A Tent Full of Bedouin Women. *Winter* 19(1):34 & 35.
- Anderson, G.A. 1994. Introduction to Israelite Religion, in *The New Interpreters Bible, Volume I*, edited by L.E. Keck. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press:272–283.

- Anderson, J.E. 2011. *Jacob and the Divine Trickster: A Theology of Deception and YHWH's Fidelity to the Ancestral Promise in the Jacob Cycle*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.
- Annas, J. 2003. *Plato: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Appelbaum, D. 1995. Three Questions that Changed the Face of Philosophy, in *The Spirit of Philosophy Series: The Vision of Kant*, edited by D. Appelbaum & J. Needleman. Queensland: Element:8–48.
- Aristotle. 1975. *The Nicomachean Ethics* (Translated with Commentaries and Glossary by Hippocrates G. Apostle). Dordrech: D. Reidel Publishing Company.
- Arndt, E.K. 2011, *Demanding our Attention: The Hebrew Bible as a Source for Christian Ethics*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans.
- Ashley, K. 1988. Interrogating Biblical Deception and Trickster Theories: Narrative of Patriarchy or Possibility. *Semeia* (42):103–116.
- Ayers, R.H. 1979. *Language, Logic and Reason in the Church Fathers: A Study of Tertullian, Augustine and Aquinas*. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag.
- Bagnall, G., Smith, G., Crawford, Baldwin, E. & Ogborn, M. 2008. *Introducing Cultural Studies*. 2nd Edition. Essex: Pearson.
- Barton, J. 1996. *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Barton, J. 1998a. *Ethics in the Old Testament*. London: SCM Press.
- Barton, J. 1998b. Historical-critical Approaches, in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, edited by J. Barton. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press:9–20.
- Barton, J. 2003. *Understanding Old Testament Ethics: Approaches and Explorations*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Barton, J. 2010. *The Bible: The Basics*. London: Routledge.

- Bellavance, E. 2000. Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38) in *Ancient Jewish Exegesis: Studies in Literary Form and Hermeneutics*. *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 62(3):526–528.
- Birch, B.C. 1991. *Let Justice Roll Down: The Old Testament, Ethics, and Christian Life*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Birch, B.C. 2007. Ethics in the Old Testament, in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible D–H, Volume 2*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press:338–347.
- Birch, B.C. & Rasmussen, L.L. 1989a. *Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg.
- Birch, B.C. & Rasmussen, L. 1989b. The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics, in *Introduction to Christian Ethics: A Reader*, edited by R.P. Hamel & K.R. Himes. New York: Paulist Press:322–332.
- Bird, P.A. 1989. The Harlot as Heroine: Narrative Art and Social Presupposition in Three Old Testament Texts. *Semeia* 46:119–139.
- Bird, P.A. 1994. The Authority of the Bible, in *The New Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible, Volume 1*, edited by L.E. Keck. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press:33–64.
- Bishop, M.M. & Kelle, B.E. 2011. *Biblical History and Israel's Past: The Changing Study of the Bible and History*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans.
- Bonner, G. 1991. Schism and Church Unity, in *Early Christianity: Origins and Evolution to AD 600*, edited by I. Hazlett. London: SPCK:218–228.
- Brenner, A. 1985. *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative*. Sheffield: JSOT Press.
- Bridge, S.L., 2009. *Getting the Old Testament: What it Meant to Them, What it Means for us*. Peabody, MD: Hendrickson Publishers.
- Brodie, T.L. 2001. *Genesis as Dialogue: A Literary, Historical and Theological Commentary*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Brown, C. 1990. *Christianity and Western Thought: A History of Philosophers, Ideas and Movements, Volume I: From the Ancient World to the Age of Enlightenment*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Brueggemann, W. 1982. *Genesis: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press.
- Cahill, L. 1985. *Between Sexes: Foundations for a Christian Ethics of Sexuality*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press.
- Cahill, L. 1996. The Bible and Christian Moral Practices, in *Christian Ethics: Problems and Prospects*, edited by L. Cahill & J.F. Childress. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press:3–17.
- Cahill, L. 2002. Christian Character, Biblical Community, and Human Values, in *Character and Scripture: Moral Formation, Community and Biblical Interpretation*, edited by W.P. Brown. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans:3–17.
- Calvin, J. 1975. *Genesis (Two Volumes in One)*. Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust.
- Camp, C.V. 2007. Gender, in *The New Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible D–H Volume 2*, edited by K.D. Sakenfeld. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press:532–534.
- Campbell, A.F. 2001. Preparatory Issues in Approaching Biblical Texts, in *The Blackwell Companion to the Hebrew Bible*, edited by L.G. Perdue. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers:3–18.
- Carr, D.M. 1996. *Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approach*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Carr, D.M. 2005. *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Carr, W.W. 2013. Will Just Any “God” Do? Isaiah’s Answer for the Question of Theological Pluralism, *Concordia Journal* 39(1):34–45.
- Carro, D. 1997. Christian Ethics, Culture Ethics and the Younger Churches. *Review and Expositor* 94 (3):411-422.

- Ceresko, A.R. 1992. *Introduction to the Old Testament: A Liberation Perspective*. New York: Orbis Books.
- Childs, J.M. 2006. *Ethics in the Community of Promise: Truth, Formation, and Decision*. MN: Augsburg Fortress.
- Clifford, R.J. 2004. Genesis 38: Its Contribution to the Jacob Story. *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 66:519–532.
- Clifford, R.J. 2012. Genesis 37–50: Joseph Story or Jacob Story? in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception and Interpretation*, edited by C.A. Evans, J.N. Lohr & D.L. Petersen. Leiden, Brill:213–229.
- Clines, D.J.A. 1993. Possibilities and Priorities of Biblical Interpretation in an International Perspective. *Biblical Interpretation* 1 (1):67-87.
- Clines, D.J.A. 1997. *The Bible and the Modern World*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Collins, J.J. 2004. *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- Cotter, W. 2009. Syncretism, in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible S–Z, Volume 5*, edited by K.D. Sakenfeld. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press:427 & 428.
- Cunningham, D.S. 2008. *Christian Ethics: The End of the Law*. London: Routledge.
- Curran, C.E. 1999. *The Catholic Moral Tradition Today: A Synthesis*. Washington: Georgetown University Press.
- Davidson, R. 1979. *Genesis 12–50*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Davies, E.W. 1981a. Inheritance Rights and the Hebrew Levirate Marriage, Part 1. *Vetus Testamentum* 31(2):133–144.
- Davies, E.W. 1981b. Inheritance Rights and the Hebrew Levirate Marriage, Part 2. *Vetus Testamentum* 31(3):257–268.
- Davies, E.W. 2006. The Bible in Ethics, in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*, edited by J.W. Rogerson & J.M. Lieu. Oxford: Oxford University Press:732–753.

- Dershowitz, A.M. 2000. *The Genesis of Justice: Ten Stories of Biblical Injustice that Led to the Ten Commandments and Modern Law*. New York: Warner Books.
- De Vaux, R. 1999. Historical and Christian Faith, in *Israel's Past in Present Research: Essays on Ancient Israelite Historiography*, edited by V.P. Long. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns:470–479.
- Devega, J.J. 2007. Documentary Hypothesis, in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible D–H, Volume 2*, edited by K.D. Sakenfeld. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press:154–155.
- Dudley, W. & Engelhard, K. (eds.). 2011. *Immanuel Kant: Key Concepts*. Durham: Acumen Publishing Limited.
- Dueck, A. 2012. Culture, Language, and Integration. *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 40 (2):116-121.
- Elliott, T.G. 1996. *The Christianity of Constantine the Great*. Scranton: University of Scranton Press.
- Esau, K. 2006. Divine Deception in the Exodus Event? *Direction* 35(1):4–17.
- Evans, C.F. 1984. Difficulties in Using the Bible for Christian Ethics. *Modern Churchman* 26 (3):27–34.
- Eveson, P.H. 2001. *The Book of Origins: Genesis Simply Explained*. New York: Evangelical Press.
- Farley, M.A. 2006. *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics*. London: Continuum.
- Ferguson, E. 2002. *Early Christians Speak: Faith and Life in the First Three Centuries, Volume 2*. Abilene, TX: A.C.U. Press.
- Ferguson, E. 2003. *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*. 3rd Edition. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans.
- Finkelstein, I. 2007. Patriarchs, Exodus, Conquest: Fact or Fiction?, in *The Quest for the Historical Israel: Debating Archaeology and the History of Early Israel*, edited by B.B. Schmidt. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature:41-56



- Finney, M. 2006. Community, in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible A–C, Volume 1*, edited by L.D. Sakenfeld. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press:711 & 712.
- Fowl, S. 2006. The Ethics of Interpretation or What's Left Over After the Elimination of Meaning, in *The Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield*, edited by S.J.A. Clines, S. Fowl & S.E. Potter. Sheffield: JSOT Press:379–397.
- Fowl, S.E. & Jones, L.G. 1991. *Reading in Communion: Scripture and Ethics in Christian Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans.
- Fretheim, T.E. 1994. The Book of Genesis: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections, in *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes, Volume I (General and Old Testament Articles Genesis, Exodus and Leviticus)*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press:321–674.
- Friedman, M.A. 1990. Tamar, a Symbol of Life: The "Killer Wife" Superstition in the Bible and Jewish Tradition. *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 15(1):23–61.
- Frymer-Kensky, T. 2000. Tamar 1, in *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/ Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, edited by C. Meyers. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans:161–163.
- Geisler, N.L. 1989. *Christian Ethics: Options and Issues*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Gerstenberger, E.S. 2002. *Theologies in the Old Testament*. London: T & T Clark.
- Goldingay, J. 1987. *Theological Diversity and the Authority of the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans.
- Goldingay, J. 2011. *Key Questions About Biblical Interpretation: Old Testament Answers*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- Goodman, L.E. 2012. Religious Pluralism. *Political Theology* 13(4):458–485.

- Gottwald, N.K. 1993. *The Hebrew Bible in Its Social World and in Ours*. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press.
- Grabbe, L.L. 2007. *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know it?* New York: T & T Clark.
- Gravett, S. L., Bohmbach, K.G., Greifenhagen, F.V. & Polaski, D.C. 2008. *An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible: A Thematic Approach*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Know Press.
- Greengus, S. 2011. *Laws in the Bible and in Early Rabbinic Collections: The Legal Legacy of the Ancient Near East*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books.
- Grelle, B. 2005. Culture and Moral Pluralism, in *The Blackwell Companion to Religious Ethics*, edited by W. Schweiker. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers:129–137.
- Gunn, D.M. & Fewell, D.N. 1993. *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gunton, C. 2000. The Church as a School of Virtue? Human Formation in Trinitarian, in *Faithfulness and Fortitude in Conversation with the Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas*, edited by M. Thiessen Nation & S. Wells. Edinburgh, T & T Clark:211–231.
- Haddorff, D. W. 1996. Can Character Ethics have Moral Rules and Principles? Christian Doctrine and Comprehensive Moral Theory. *Horizons* 23 (1):48-71.
- Hall, C.M. 1996. *Identity, Religion and Values: Implications for Practitioners*. Washington: Taylor & Francis.
- Hanley, R.P. 2009. *Adam Smith and the Character of Virtue*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hanson, K.C. (ed). 2001. *Water for a Thirsty Land: Israelite Literature and Religion: Herman Gunkel*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- Harrington, D. & Keenan, J. 2002. *Jesus and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges Between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology*. Lanham, MD: Sheed & Ward.

- Hauerwas, S. 1972. Toward an Ethics of Character. *Theological Studies* 33(4):698–715.
- Hauerwas, S. 1974. *Vision and Virtue: Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection*. Notre Dame: Fides.
- Hauerwas, S. 1981. *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Hayward, R. 2000. Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38) in Ancient Jewish Exegesis: Studies in Literary Form and Hermeneutics. *Journal of Semitic Studies* 45(2):382–384.
- Hayes, J.H. 1979. *An Introduction To Old Testament Study*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.
- Hefner, P.J. 2003. Religion in the Context of Culture, Theology, and Global Ethics. *Zygon* 38(1):185–195.
- Hellerman, J.H. 2001. *The Ancient Church as Family*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- Hendel, R. 2012. Historical Context, in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception and Interpretation*, edited by C.A. Evans, J.N. Lohr & D.L. Peterson. Leiden: Brill:51–81.
- Herbert, D. 1998. Christian Ethics, Community and Modernity. *Modern Believing* 39(3):44–52.
- Hess, R.S. 2007. Law, in *Dictionary of Biblical Criticism and Interpretation*, edited by S.E. Porter. London: Routledge:191–193.
- Holy Bible: New International Version*. 1973. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing.
- Horbury, W. 1991. The Jewish Dimension, in *Early Christianity: Origins and Evolution to AD 600*, edited by I. Hazlett. London: SPCK:40–50.
- Huddleston, J.R. 2002. Divestiture, Deception, and Demotion: The Garment Motif in Genesis 37–39. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 26(4):47–62.
- Huebner, H.J. 2012. *An Introduction to Christian Ethics: History, Movements, People*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press.

- Hughes, G.J. 2001. *Aristotle on Ethics*. London & New York: Routledge Philosophy Guide Books.
- Hunter, J.D. 2010. *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*. New York: Oxford Press.
- Hütter, R. 1998. The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics: Christian Freedom and God's commandments, in *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, edited by K.L. Bloomquist & Stumme, J.R. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress:31–54.
- Jackson, M. 2002. Lot's Daughters and Tamar as Tricksters and the Patriarchal Narratives as Feminist Theology. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 98:29–46.
- Janzen, J.G. 1993. *Abraham and All the Families of the Earth: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis 12–50*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans.
- Janzen, W. 1994. *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Jeansonne, S.P. 1990. *The Women of Genesis: From Sarah to Potiphar's Wife*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- Jenks, C. 1993. *Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Jerslid, P. 1990. *Making Moral Decisions: A Christian Approach to Personal and Social Ethics*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress.
- Jones, G. 2001. The Authority of Scripture and Christian Ethics, in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*, edited by R. Gill. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press:16–28.
- Kaiser, W.C. 1983. *Toward Old Testament Ethics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing.
- Kaiser, W.C. 1994. How Can Christians Derive Principles from the Specific Commands of the Law, in *Readings in Christian Ethics: Volume 1 Theory and Method*, edited by D.K. Clark & R.V. Rakestraw. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books:192–201.

- Kallenberg, B.J. 1997. The Master Argument of MacIntyre's After Virtue, in *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition: Christian Ethics after MacIntyre*, edited by N. Murphy, B.J. Kallenberg & M. Thiessen Nation. Nore Dam: University of Nore Dam Press:7-29.
- Kawashima, R.S. 2012. Literary Analysis, in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception and Interpretation*, edited by C.A. Evans, J.N. Lohr & D.L. Petersen. Leiden: Brill:83–104.
- Khan, G. 2013. The Languages of the Old Testament, in *The New Cambridge History of the Bible: Volume I From Beginnings to 600*, edited by J.C. Paget & J. Schaper. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press:3-21.
- King, T.J. 2009. *The Realignment of the Priestly Literature: The Priestly Narrative in Genesis and Its Relation to Priestly Legislation and the Holiness School*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications.
- King, P.J. & Stager, L.E. 2001. *Life in Biblical Israel*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Kirkpatrick, F.G. 2001. *The Ethics of Community: New Dimensions to Religious Ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Klingbeil, G.A. 2003. Historical Criticism, in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, edited by T.D. Alexander & D.W. Baker. Downers Grove: IL: InterVarsity Press:401–417.
- Knauth, R.J.D. 2005. Israel, in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Historical Books: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, edited by B.T. Arnold & H.G.M. Williamson. Nottingham: InterVarsity Press:514–520.
- Knierim, R.P. 1995. *The Task of Old Testament Theology: Substance, Method and Cases*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans.
- Knight, D.A. & Levine, A. 2011. *The Meaning of the Bible: What the Jewish Scriptures and Christian Old Testament Can Teach Us*. New York: Harper One.

- Landman, C.A. 1984. A Profile of Feminist Theology, in *Sexism and Feminism in Theological Perspective*, edited by W.S. Vorster. Pretoria: Unisa Press:1–35.
- Loades, A. 1998. Feminist Interpretation, in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, edited by J. Barton. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press:81–94.
- Loewen, H.J. 1989. Rethinking Christian Ethics: From Moral Decisions to Character Formation. *Direction* 18(1):55–66.
- Loewen, J.A. 2000. *The Bible in Cross-cultural Perspective*. Pasadena. CA: William Carey Library.
- Long, E. L. 1965. Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics: A Look at Basic Options. *Interpretation* 19 (2):149-162.
- Macguire, D. 1989. Ethics: How to Do it, in *Introduction to Christian Ethics: A Reader*, edited by R.P. Hamel & K.R. Himes. New York: Paulist Press:533–550.
- Macguire, D.C. 1994. Ethics: How to Do it? in *Readings in Christian Ethics: Volume 1: Theory and Method*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books:284–297.
- Maddox, R.L. 1987. Damned if You Do and Damned if You Don't: Tamar a Feminist Foremother. *Daughters of Sarah* 13(4):14–17.
- Malchow, B.V. 1996. *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible: What is New and What is Old?* Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press.
- Manor, D.W. 1984. A Brief History of Levirate Marriage as it Relates to the Bible. *Restoration Quarterly* 27(3):129–142.
- Martens, E. A. 1996. The Shape of an Old Testament Theology for a Post Modern Culture. *Direction* 25(2):5-15.
- Martin, L.H. 1991. The Jewish Dimension, in *Early Christianity: Origins and Evolution to AD 600*, edited by I. Hazlett. London: SPCK:40–50.
- Matlock, M.D. 2007. Obeying the First Part of the Tenth Commandment: Applications from the Levirate Marriage Law. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 31(3):295–310.

- Matthews, V.H. 2005. Israel Society, in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Historical Books: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, edited by B.T. Arnold & H.G.M. Williamson. Nottingham: InterVarsity Press:520–530.
- Matthews, V.H. & Moyer, J.C. 1997. *The Old Testament: Text and Context*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers.
- McDermott, T. 1993. *The World's Classics: Thomas Aquinas Selected Philosophical Writings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McDonald, I.I.H. 1995. *Christian Values: Theory and Practice in Christian Ethics Today*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.
- McFaul, T.R. 2003. *Transformation Ethics: Developing the Christian Moral Imagination*. Lanham, Oxford: University Press of America.
- McInerney, R. 2004. *Aquinas*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- McLaren, R.B. 1994. *Christian Ethics: Foundations and Practice*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Meeks, W.A. 1986. *The Moral World of the First Christians*. Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press.
- Menn, E. 1997. *Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38) in Ancient Jewish Exegesis: Studies in Literary Form and Hermeneutics*. Leiden: Brill.
- Meyer, C. 2000. An Introduction to the Bible: Critical Biblical Scholarship, in *Women in Scripture*, edited by C. Meyers. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans.
- Mills, M.E. 2001. *Biblical Morality: Moral Perspectives in Old Testament Narratives*. Hampshire: Ashgate.
- Miller, P.D. 2000. *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology: Collected Essays*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Miscall, P.D. 1998. Introduction to Narrative Literature, in *The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume II*, edited by L.E. Keck. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press:539–552.
- Mizzoni, J. 2010. *Ethics: The Basics*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

- Moberley, R.W.L. 1992. *The Old Testament of the Old Testament: Patriarchal Narratives and Mosaic Yahwism*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- Moberley, R.W.L. 2001. When, Where, by Whom and How was Genesis 12–50 Written? in *Genesis and Exodus: With an Introduction by John Goldingay*, edited by J.W. Rogerson, R.W.L. Moberly & W. Johnstone. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press:138–151.
- Montague, G.T. 2007. *Understanding the Bible: A Basic Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. New York: Paulist Press.
- Mudge, L.S. 1998. *The Church as Moral Community: Ecclesiology and Ethics in Ecumenical Debate*. New York: Continuum Publishing Company.
- Nelson, P. 1987. *Narrative and Morality: A Theological Inquiry*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Neubeck, K.J. & Glasberg, D.S. 2005. *Sociology: Diversity, Conflict and Change*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Niditch, S. 2012. Genesis, in *Women's Bible Commentary: Twentieth Anniversary Edition*, edited by C.A. Newsom, S.H. Ringe & J.E. Lapsley. Louisville, KY: Westminster Press:27–45.
- Nye, M. 2008. *Religion: The Basics*. 2nd Edition. London: Routledge.
- O'Connor, J. 2004. Ethics in Popular Culture. *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 24(2):3-23.
- Ogletree, T.W. 2003. *The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Paget, J.C. 2013. The Interpretation of the Bible in the Second Century, in *The New Cambridge History of the Bible: Volume I From Beginnings to 600*, edited by J.C. Paget & J. Schaper. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press:549-583.
- Pakaluk, M. 2005. *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pappas, N. 1995. *A Routledge Guidebook to Plato and the Republic*. London: Routledge.



- Parry, R. 2004. *Old Testament Story and Christian Ethics: The Rape of Dinah as a Case Study*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers.
- Patterson, R.D. 1999. The Old Testament Use of an Archetype: The Trickster. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42:385–394.
- Phillips, A. 2002. *Essays on Biblical Law*. London/New York: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Pinckaers, S. 1995. *The Sources of Christian Ethics: Translated From the Third Edition by Sr. Mary Thomas Noble, O.P.* Washington: The Catholic University of America Press.
- Pinckaers, S. 2001. *Morality: The Catholic View*. South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press.
- Powell, M.A. 1990. *What is Narrative Criticism?* Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress.
- Rendtorff, R. 1977. *The Problem of the Process of Transmission in the Pentateuch*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Richard, L. 1988. *Is There A Christian Ethics?* New York: Paulist Press.
- Richardson, K.A. 2007. Ethics and Interpretation, in *Dictionary of Biblical Criticism and Interpretation*, edited by S.E. Porter. London: Routledge:102–104.
- Rhoads, D. 2009. Narrative Criticism, in *The New Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible Me–R*, edited by K.D. Sakenfeld. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press:222-223.
- Rogerson, J.W. 2001. The Old Testament and Christian Ethics, in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*, edited by R. Gill. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press:29–41.
- Rogerson, J.W. 2006. Israel to the End of the Persian Period: History, Social, Political and Economic Background, in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*, edited by J.W. Rogerson & J.M. Lieu. Oxford: Oxford University Press:268–284.

- Rogerson, J. 2012. The Old Testament and Christian Ethics, in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*, edited by R. Gill. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press:28–40.
- Roop, E.F. 1987. *Genesis: Believers Church Bible Commentary*. Ontario: Herald Press.
- Ross, A.P. 1988. *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Sabella, B. 2010. Of Faith and Society. *Dialogue & Alliance* 24(2):40–46.
- Sailhamer, J. 1994. Judah and Tamar, in *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary: An Abridgement of the Gold Medallion-Winning Expositions Bible Commentary Volume 1: Old Testament*, edited by L.K. Baker & I.I.I. Kallenberger. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing:47 & 48.
- Schmid, K. 2010. *Genesis and the Moses Story: Israel's Dual Origins in the Hebrew Bible*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.
- Schmid, K. 2012. Genesis in the Pentateuch, in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, edited by C.A. Evans, J.N. Lohr & D.L. Petersen. Leiden: Brill:27–50.
- Scruton, R., Singer, P., Janaway, C. & Tanner, M. 1997. *German Philosophers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Scullion, J.J. 1992. *Genesis: A Commentary for Students, Teachers and Preachers*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press.
- Sharon, D.M. 2005. Some Results of a Structural Semiotic Analysis of the Story of Judah and Tamar. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 29(3):289–318.
- Ska, J. 2006. *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.
- Ska, J. 2012. The Study of the Book of Genesis: The Beginning of Critical Reading, in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception and Interpretation*, edited by C.A. Evans, J.N. Lohr & D.L. Petersen. Leiden/Boston: Brill:3–26.

- Skinner, J. 1976. *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.
- Soni, J. & Raymaker, J.A. 2011. Focus Introduction: Toward Sharing Values Across Cultures and Religions. *Journal of Religious Ethics* 39(2):193–203.
- Soulen, R.N. & Soulen, R.K. 2001. *Handbook of Biblical Criticism: Now Includes Precritical and Postcritical Interpretation*. 3rd Edition. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Sparks, K.L. 2007. Form Criticism, in *Dictionary of Biblical Criticism and Interpretation*, edited by S.E. Porter. London: Routledge:111–114.
- Spohn, W.C. 1984. *What are They Saying About Scripture and Ethics?* New York: Paulist Press.
- Spohn, W.C. 2005. Scripture, in *The Oxford Handbook of Theological Ethics*, edited by G. Meilaender & W. Werpehowski. New York: Oxford University Press:93–111.
- Sprintzen, D. 2009. *Critique of Western Philosophy and Social Theory*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Statman, D. 1997. Introduction to Virtue Ethics, in *Virtue Ethics*, edited by D. Statman. Washington: Georgetown University Press:1–41.
- Stead, C. 1991. Greek Influence on Christian Thought, in *Early Christianity: Origins and Evolution to AD 600*, edited by I. Hazlett. London: SPCK:175–185.
- Steinberg, N. 1988. Israelite Tricksters, Their Analogues and Cross-cultural Study. *Semeia* 42:1–13.
- Steinberg, N. 1993. *Kinship and Marriage in Genesis: A Household Economics Perspective*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- Tarnas, R. 1991. *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas that have Shaped Our World View*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Taylor, R.A. 2003. Form Criticism, in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, edited by T.D. Alexander & D.W. Baker. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press:336–343.

- Thiselton, A.C. 2009. *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans.
- Thompson, T.L. 1999. Historical and Christian Faith, in *Israel's Past in Present Research: Essays on Ancient Israelite Historiography*, edited by V.P. Long. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns:480–484.
- Thorsteinsson, R.M. 2008. The Role of Morality in the Rise of Roman Christianity, in *Exploring Early Christian Identity*, edited by B. Holmberg Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck:139–157.
- Timmer, D.C. 2009. Character Formed in the Crucible: Job's Relationship with God and Joban Character Ethics. *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 3(1):1–16.
- Troost, A. 1983. *A Christian Ethos: A Philosophical Survey*. Bloemfontein: Patmos.
- Tov, E. 2012. *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*. 3rd Edition, Revised & Expanded. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- Van der Ven, J.A. 1998. *Formation of the Moral Self*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans.
- Van Wolde, E.J. 1997. Narratives. *Biblical Interpretation* 5(1):1–28.
- Verhey, A. 2004. Scripture and Ethics: Canon and Community. *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 58(1):13–32.
- Viviano, P.A. 2007. Documentary Hypothesis, in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible D–H, Volume 2*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press:154 & 155.
- Waltke, B.K. & Fredricks, C.J. 2001. *Genesis: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing.
- Walton, J.H. 2001. *The NIV Application Commentary: From Biblical Text to Contemporary Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing.
- Webb, W.J. 2001. *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

- Weisberg, D.E. 2004. The Widow of Our Discontent: Levirate Marriage in the Bible and Ancient Israel. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 28(4):403–429.
- Wells, S. (ed.). 2010. *Christian Ethics: An Introductory Reader*. Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Wells, S. & Quash, B. 2010. *Introducing Christian Ethics*. Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Wenham, G.J. 1994. *Word Biblical Commentary Volume 2: Genesis 16–50*. Dallas, TX: Words Books.
- Wenham, G.J. 2000. *Story as Torah: Reading the Old Testament Ethically*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.
- Wenham, G.J. 2006. Law in the Old Testament, in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*, edited by J.W. Rogerson & J.M. Lieu. Oxford: Oxford University Press:351–361.
- West, D. 2010. *Continental Philosophy: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity.
- West, H. (ed.). 2006. *The Blackwell Guide to Mill's Utilitarianism*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Westfall, C.L. 2007. Narrative Criticism, in *Dictionary of Biblical Criticism and Interpretation*, edited by S.E. Porter. London: Routledge:237 & 238.
- Westerholm, S. 1988. *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans.
- Westermann, C. 1986. *Genesis 37-50: A Commentary/Claus Westermann; translated by John J. Scullion*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publication House.
- Whitelam, K.W. 1998. The Social World of the Bible, in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, edited by J. Barton. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press:35–46.
- Whitelam, K.W. 2006. Introduction: General Problems of Studying the Text of the Bible in Order to Reconstruct History and Social Background, in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*, edited by J.W. Rogerson & J.M. Lieu. Oxford: Oxford University Press:255–267.

- Whybray, R.N. 1987. *The Making of the Pentateuch: A Methodological Study*. Sheffield: JSOT Press.
- Whybray, R.N. 2001. Genesis, in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, edited by J. Barton & J. Muddimain. Oxford: Oxford University Press:38–40.
- Wickes, J. 2008. Ephrem's Interpretation of Genesis. *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 52(1):45–65.
- Wildavsky, A. 1994. Survival Must Not be Gained Through Sin: The Moral of the Joseph Stories Prefigured Through Judah and Tamar on 14 June 1999. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 62:37–48.
- Williams, M.J. 2008. Lies, Lies, I Tell You! The Deceptions of Genesis. *Calvin Theological Journal* 43(1):9–20.
- Wogaman, J.P. 2011. *Christian Ethics: A Historical Introduction*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Womer, J.L. 1987. *Morality and Ethics in Early Christianity*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- Wright, C.J.H. 2005. Ethics, in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books*, edited by B.T. Arnold & H.G.M. Williamson. Nottingham: InterVarsity Press:259–268.
- Wright, J.W. 2003. Ethics, in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch, A Compendium of Contemporary*, edited by T.D. Alexander & D.W. Baker. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press:224–240.
- Zakovitch, Y. 2010. Inner-Biblical Interpretation, in *Reading Genesis: Ten Methods*, edited by R. Hendel. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press:92–118.