THE FEMINIST THEOLOGY AND WOMANIST THEOLOGY, A COMPARATIVE STUDY

by

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DEDICATION

The study is dedicated to my parents, Moshikidi (Mmaswi), and Mpudu (Chitjana Marumu a Phogole) my wife Mashianyane Patches (Boledi), and my loving children Supreme Maphake (Chidi), Primrose Mapepu (Chitjana), Prince Tselane (Hlabirwa), Beauty Queen Motlatle Ntjoakae (Mahlako), and Othniel Maoto (Phaahle).

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(g) Dr L Kretzchsmer who gave me guidelines on the methodology of my research.

(h) Mr Douglas Vale who edited my final draft.

DECLARATION

"I declare that the thesis hereby submitted to the University of the North for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has not been previously submitted by me fir a degree at any other University, that it is my own work in design and execution, and that all material contained therein has been duly acknowledged".

SUMMARY

The study is an attempt at and the exploration to show the differences and the similarities between the Feminist Theology and the Womanist Theology in their struggle for liberation as they are supposed to be working together in their quest for a liberation theology of women to free themselves from the male dominated and patriarchal society. This is after all the war of the two sexes.

In Chapter One, the investigator presents and outlines the definitions and meaning of Feminist Theology, its objectives and the definitions and meaning of Womanist Theology, its objectives. Feminist Theology is summarised as an attempt by white women to bring about transformation in the patriarchal society, using the very androcentric Bible as their basic source and tool. Womanist Theology is the correction and reaction against Feminist Theology. It is a response and resistance on the brutal or cruel treatment black women received from the wives of slave masters and from contemporary white female employers.

In Chapter Two, the researcher goes further to describe the origin and history of Feminist Theology in the United States of America as the founder countries for Feminist Theology, extracting the different women movements which were at the forefront in the formation and development of Feminist Theology, showing their different traditions and factors which gave birth to Feminist Theology.

In Chapter Three, the researcher describes the origin and history of Womanist Theology in the United States of America. The investigator shows how Womanist Theology emerged from North America as a movement to fight against white feminism government and policy in general. Here he also brings to light the factors which brought out the beginning of Womanist Theology, both social, theological and political and how Womanist Theology as a counter movement developed.

In Chapter Four, the investigator treat critically the theology and contributions of the pillar of Feminist Theology, namely Rosemary Radford Ruether and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Here their theology, hermeneutics. Both Ruether and Fiorenza find something in a situation of struggle, which is potentially empowering for women in the struggle for liberation in the biblical tradition. The different is brought about by their emphasis in their hermeneutical point of views. The difference is that Ruether finds it primarily in the text while Fiorenza finds it primarily behind the text. They have got different strategies on the approach of the Biblical Text and Models.

In Chapter Five, the thesis attempt to be critique of Womanist Theology. Delores Williams and Jacquelyn Grant's theologies, methods and hermeneutics are discussed in this chapter. Both of them sees feminism as a concern with white women's needs. The chapter pays special attention on the starting point in Womanist Theology, Christology, and black women's situation. Their concern is not only gender but racism and classism is their focal points. Their emphasis is mainly on poverty of black women.

As the thesis develops in Chapter Six, the researcher further shows the divergences and convergences in Feminist and Womanist Theologies. The researcher shows how the two Theologies' reflections are grounded in experience and bearing the mark of a colonised people. The influence of both the socio-economic and religio-cultural realities is apparent in the development of the two theologies, although each operates from its cultural background and therefore the two theologies fail to be the same. Though both are fighting against patriarchy and are liberation struggles, in Womanist Theology there is an extension of class and racism struggle and liberation for black males also.

At the end of the thesis in Chapter Seven, the researcher deems it necessary to make constructive statements and recommendations to round off his work of comparison between the two theologies. The main final idea are on how the church must be ready to meet the challenge of freeing women from long term subjugation by the church and the patriarchal society. The church is also challenged to view African culture with biblical

eye to transform the oppressive elements in African culture and make it meaningful to Christian Society so that both men and women will interrelate theologically, ecclesiastically and socially as equal partners in the worship of God. Feminists and womanists must be bound by the cross of Jesus Christ to reconcile. There must reign the spirit of cultural tolerance because their few differences are emanating from their different cultural backgrounds and different experiences.

Both feminist and womanists agree on the necessity to abolish the perverted theological language which puts women on the margin and sidelines them as minors in their own families, for example a curse of calling men as the heads of the families while women are in actual fact the heads. The Northern Sotho tribes usually call women "malapa", meaning families. A man would say, "ke sa ya go bolela le lapa", meaning that he is still going to consult his wife before he can enter into a certain binding contract like selling a cattle.

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CHAPTER ONE

1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

1.1 Introduction

Feminists and womanists are supposed to be working together to end their repression in society and oppression by men, but instead they are fighting and opposing one another. What could be the sources of such intense animosity and conflict?

There are fundamental differences between feminist and womanist theorists, in spite of the similarities that exist between the two traditions. This study is an attempt at and the exploration of the two traditions in their quest for a liberation theology for and of women.

However, feminists and womanists could minimise their differences and accentuate their similarities in their struggle for freedom from the male dominated and patriarchal society. They either work together as women or they will all perish. After all, this is the war of the two sexes.

1.2 Feminist Theology

The following feminist theologians namely, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Rosemary Radford Ruether will be discussed in this study.

1.2.1 Definition

Feminist theology is an attempt by white women to bring about transformation in a patriarchal society, using the very androcentric Bible as their basic source and tool. It is a gender struggle that tries to liberate women from an androcentric Biblical reading.

Fiorenza (1984:6) defines feminist theology as theology of liberation which must remain first and foremost a critical theology of liberation as long as women suffer the injustice and oppression of patriarchal structures.

It is important to remember that all theology is originally grounded in experience, an experience of faith as a transforming vision, a revelatory experience that transcends ordinary common sense experience. Throughout history women and men have had such experiences, and have had them in abundance. But from a contemporary woman's point of view the question arises as to how far the experience of women has remained in the past an untapped source for traditional theology. Theological formulations which found official, institutional sanction and were handed down in the codified teachings of established theological schools were entirely the creation of men (King 1993:163). This is true of the theologies of all religions. One must therefore ask how the creation and formulations of one sex alone can possibly be universally valid for all people, women and men? In the past it was always male theologians who wrote about the image, nature and place of women in the church and society, thus articulating and defining what woman was to be. Today women write about themselves, about their own experience and interpretation of faith, their self-understanding as women. Thus in feminist theology women have become the subject of a new theological approach rather than simply being the object of theology. Therefore feminist theology is rooted in the religious experience of women themselves. Feminist theology has an experiential as well as experimental quality about it, and has a new prophetic dimension of great importance for the future of Christianity.

According to Eugene (1993:1) two heads are better than one; feminists have founded their analysis in women's experience. Thus it focuses mainly on white women's experience of life and therefore it is seen as a single issue movement with the predominant emphasis on sexism or gender.

Fiorenza (1993:154) defines it as an approach to culture that understands and analyses gender relations in structural terms with particular attention to the structural disempowerment of women. It revolves around women's personal experience, family experience and the social structural experience of white women. Feminist theology, in the sense of women perceiving themselves and their role in life in a radically new way because of the influence of the Gospel, can be traced back to the New Testament period itself (Kretzschmar 1990:37-51).

By women's experience Fiorenza (1993:12) explains that it includes experience of the divine, experience of oneself, and experience of the community and the world, in an interacting dialectic. Received symbols, formulas, and laws are either authenticated or not through their ability to illuminate and interpret experience. According to the women's Bible p. xiv, "It is the way in which females/women in the modern world are engaged in interpreting and assessing the meaning of biblical text from a self-consciously feminist perspective using the biblical instrument". Fiorenza further in her book *Searching the Scripture* 1993:257, defines it as the study that recognises the systematic oppression and marginalisation of women of all different classes, races, ethnic origins, sexual orientation and physical abilities to be one of the most complex and pervasive injustices of human societies. Ackerman (1991:XVI) defines feminism as a radically transformed perspective which questions our social, cultural, political and religious traditions and calls for structural changes in all these spheres.

In feminist theology women interrogate the Bible by using the hermeneutics of suspicion. For example, when looking as to how women experience reality, i.e. experience of every day life, looking into Scripture through the window of situation and experience of reality, they find that the justification of wrong things with the use of Scripture is their theology. There is no harmony between theology and experience. For example, the love of God does not include all people on an equal basis. In feminism the Bible is deconstructed to the point where it is exposed for what it is, namely an androcentric document aimed at

the repression of women and enhancement of male privilege and power. The biblical message would then be constructed in such a manner that women also are seen to be equally active agents in the realization of God's rule on earth. Kretzschmar (1995:147) argues that the Church cannot preach liberation if it oppresses the women within its own ranks. Therefore the critical principle of feminist theology is the promotion of the full humanity and equal rights of women.

Whatever denies, diminishes or distort the full humanity of women must be presumed not to reflect the divine or an authentic relations to the divine, or to reflect the authentic nature of things or to be the message or work of an authentic redeemer or a community of redemption.

Feminism stands for openness, creativity, and dynamic human relationships. Therefore, feminism has become the shorthand for the proclamation that women's experience should become an integral part of what goes into the definition of being human. It highlights the woman's world and their world view as they struggle side by side with men to realise their full potential as human beings.

It seeks to express that male-human is a partner with female-human, and that both expressions of humanity are needed to shape a balanced community within which each would experience a fullness of being. Feminism calls for the incorporation of the woman into the community of interpretation of what it means to be human. According to Sakenfeld (1988:5-6) a feminist is one who seeks justice and equality for all people and who is particularly concerned with the fate of women-in the midst of all people.

1.2.2 Objectives of Feminist Theology

According to Grant (1989:45) there are several objectives of feminist theology which, in general, characterise its perspective.

Firstly, feminist theology seeks to develop a holistic theology. Feminist theology rejects the traditional forms of oppressive and one-sided, male dominated theologies, which arise from patriarchal religions. Women have begun to see that continuous oppression in the church and society has its basis in these patriarchal religions. Historically, these theologies have emerged out of the experience of only one half of the human race, namely men.

Secondly, in seeking to be a holistic, feminist theology calls for the eradication of the dualism in existence which are inherent in patriarchy. A patriarchy is characterised by male-domination and female submission and subordination. In such a society, men are considered strong, intelligent, rational and aggressive while women are considered weak, irrational and docile. Feminists propose that the passive, weak traits are not the sole possession of women only. Women and men to varying degrees and independently of sex, have both passive and active traits, strong and weak personality characteristics.

Thirdly, a feminist theology seeks to conceptualise new and positive images of women. Throughout history, including the history of theology, women have been portrayed in negative terms. They have been sources of evil, for example, the story of Eve (Gen 2:4), when God gave a commandment not to eat the fruit of the tree in the centre of the garden of Eden, God actually spoke to Adam not to Eve. But the whole picture of the fall of men is ascribed artificially to Eve as her point of weakness and yet she had been portrayed as the source of evil and adultery, as if she could commit adultery alone, without a male person. A male person is always covered with good and correctness. These negative images must be changed to reflect true realities of true humanity in the inclusive sense. Obviously this belief in the inferiority of the woman and in her exclusive instrumentality for sin and death is based on a misreading of the Genesis accounts of creation and the fall (Gen 2:4) and on failure to discern the distinctive purpose of each of the creation narratives. For creation accounts taken at their face value furnish no grounds whatever for this belief. Rather, they make fundamental statements concerning the nature of

humanity in relation to God and the rest of creation, and concerning the personal relationship between man and woman.

Fourthly, feminist theology seeks to re-evaluate male-articulated doctrines. Doctrines developed under a system of patriarchy merely perpetuate patriarchal structures. As the systems are challenged, so are the doctrines. For example, let us consider the doctrine of God. God is pictured primarily as Father, Lord, King and Master. All of these names related to God are masculine names and characters. We are made to believe that the masculinity of God is neither accidental nor intentional.

Finally, feminist aims at changing the world, transforming the relations between women and men so that all people can have equal chances of fulfilling their entire human potential.

Feminism is a radically transformed perspective which questions our social, cultural, political and religious traditions and it calls for structural change in all these spheres. All versions of feminism hold that the existing relations between the sexes in which women are subordinated to men, are not satisfactory and ought to be changed (Ramazanoglu 1989:8-9).

Theologically feminism seeks to exercise the patriarchal view of God. God should not exclusively be addressed as "He", and therefore God can no longer be imagined or presented in masculine form only. Some feminists have begun to present God as being as much feminine as masculine. Some have chosen to present God as female, for example Daly and Fiorenza 1993:69. Many have made their flight to various goddess spirituality movements.

For feminists, the central dilemma of the Christian doctrinal discussion is located at the point of Christology, which is why it is the central concern of this project. In challenging

this, the development of feminist theology, specifically articulates the meaning of the gospel of Jesus Christ for women and promotes the liberation of women from oppressive structures which have neglected their humanity.

When women read the Bible, they discover the existence of an explicit patriarchal bias but also the evidence of a more subtle androcentrism in the world view of the authors of the Bible. "The Bible was used by the male readers and interpreters as being an instrument of patriarchy to oppress women" (Masenya 1996:30). This problem made the reason of the emergence of feminist theology, the main goal of which is to counteract text used against women. Another main aim of feminism is to free the Bible from a history of patriarchal interpretations by re-reading key texts dealing with women in the light of feminist critique.

1.3 Womanist Theology

The following womanist theologians namely, Jacquelyn Grant and Delores Williams will be discussed in this study.

1.3.1 Definition

Williams tries to present womanist theology as the correction and reaction on feminist theology. In her conversation with two groups, that is Group A and Group B of black Christian women which she recorded on page 42 of *The Colour of Feminism*, or "speaking the Black Woman's Tongue", in Volume 45 No 7 April 29, 1985:164-165, one can deduce that womanist theology is an extension of feminist theology which looks like a dress which is too small to fit the womanist theologians. This means that feminist theology is very limited and it does not have enough material and objectives to satisfy the needs of black women. "The feminism looks real pretty, but there just ain't enough in it to fit me" (Williams 1985:42). Williams differentiate between feminist and womanist

theologies, the former being the advancement of the cause of white supremacy and extension of white women's privilege rather than fighting for the liberation of black women and all other black people as it is the case with womanist theology. Womanist theology speaks the black woman's tongue and it tells the very truth of the black woman's historical existence in North America. The other main cause of womanist theology was to colourise feminism so that it does not reinforce white supremacy (Williams 1985:43).

Williams further explains it as a response against and resistance to the brutal or cruel treatment black women have received from the wives of slave masters and from contemporary white female employers (Williams 1993:3). North American women face the predicaments of poverty, sexual and economic exploitation, surrogacy, domestic violence, homelessness, rape, motherhood, single-parenting, ethnicity and meeting with God. Many black women have testified that "God helped them make a way out of no way" (Williams 1993:6). They believe God is involved not only in their struggle , but that God also had supported their struggle for quality of life. The slave effort to create an alternative value system represents a struggle to achieve a positive quality of life. It is a protest against racial narcissism (Williams 1993:9).

African-American women experience sexist oppression at the major leadership level and other levels of church life. Williams (1993:14) and thus womanist theology was a reaction on this problem.

According to Walker, Womanism is a way of black women affirming themselves as black (King 1993:77). It is a theology with black women at the centre (Journal 2/3/1987:69). Thus womanist theology was started by North American African American women in response to the oppression that as Africans they suffered both as women and as blacks in the United States of America. While Anglo-American feminists have founded their analysis only in women's experience, African-American women have grounded theirs also in the experience of all oppressed people struggling for liberation. A womanist.

according to Walker, is committed to survival and wholeness of all entire people, male and female (Eugene, 1993:1).

"Womanist" is taken from the black folk culture expression of mothers to female children, "O šomile Sesadi, Mosadi o dira bjalo". "O mosadisadi". You acting womanish-like a woman-acting grown up, being grownup, responsible, in charge, serious. According to Walker these expressions mean "wanting to know more and in greater depth that is good for one ... outrageous, audacious, courageous and willful behaviour" (King 1987:77). Her universality includes loving men and women, sexuality or nonsexuality. These expressions, however, are inclusive of childless women also because every female adult is a woman, regardless of whether she has children or not.

Walker insists that a womanist is also "committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female". She is no separatist except for health. A womanist is a black feminist or feminist of colour or womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender (King, 1987:78).

This suggests that two main concerns of womanist theology are survival, and community building. However womanist theology is seen as tri-dimensional, focussing on the triple oppression under racism, sexism and classism. To be true to ourselves, we cannot ignore any aspect of these three experiences in any liberation struggle. Womanist theology engaged all three forms of oppression in order to speak to the daily and total struggle of poor African-American women. Consequently, simply addressing racism and sexism is inadequate to bring about total liberation.

1.3.2 Objectives of Womanist Theology

The starting point in womanism theology is the assumption that the Bible is a patriarchal document, written by males. According to Williams (1987:69) it must firstly have a

multi-dialogical intent, interacting with many diverse social, political and religious communities concerned about human survival and productive quality of life for the oppressed.

Secondly, womanist theology must have a liturgical intent so that it can be relevant and challenging to the thought/worship/action of the black church. The Bible, a major source in black church liturgy, must be subjected to the scrutiny of justice principles.

Thirdly, it must be committed both to reason and to the validity of female imagery and metaphorical language in theological statements. Williams (1987:69) wants womanist theological language to be an instrument for change in church and society. Although the methodologies of womanist theologians vary according to their field of speciality, their similarities are greater than their differences because of their common perspectives and advocacy stance.

Weems (1988:23) for example, respects the biblical text, uses her experience of black women's life and culture to retell biblical stories in a popular way. She attempts to combine the best of feminine biblical criticism, with its passion for reclaiming and reconstructing, with the best of African American oral tradition with its gift of storytelling and its love of drama. She also includes her own experience of being an educated, privileged, black woman, and gives discussion questions to encourage her readers to apply the Bible to their life today. She recognises that when African American women read the Bible they do not share the author's gender or cultural viewpoint, so she looks for the voices of the oppressed in the text. One example she gives, is the story of Hagar, an African slave woman, white woman Sara, the slave holding mistress, agrees to her husband's sexual molestation.

Although Grant (1989:218) has argued that the white feminist analysis of theology and Christology is inadequate for salvific efficacy with respect to black women, she contends

that it is not totally irrelevant to black women's needs. She believes that black women should take seriously the feminist analysis, but they should not allow themselves to be co-opted on behalf of the agendas of white women, for as she has argues, they are often racist unintentionally or by intention.

Another objective and challenge therefore is to black women. Feminists have identified some problems associated with language and symbolism of the church, theology, and Christology. They have been able to show that exclusive masculine language and imagery are contributing factors undergirding the oppression of women.

In addressing the present day, womanists must investigate the relationship between the oppression of women and theological symbolism. Even though black women have been able to transcend some of the oppressive tendencies of white male and black male articulated theologies, careful study reveals that some traditional symbols are inadequate for us today. The Christ understood as the stranger, the outcast, the hungry, the weak, the poor, makes the traditional male Christ (black and white) less significant. Even our sisters, the womanists of the past, though they exemplified no problems with the symbols themselves, had some suspicions of the effects of a male image of the divine, for they did challenge the oppressive and distorted use of it in the church's theology. In so doing, they were able to move from a traditional oppressive Christology, with respect to women, to an egalitarian Christology. This kind of equalitarian Christology was operative in Lee's argument for the right of women to preach. She argued that the savour died for the woman as well as for the man. The crucifixion was for universal salvation, not just for male salvation or, as we may extend the argument to include, not just for white salvation. This Christ came and died, no less for the woman as for the man; no less for blacks as for whites. If the man may preach, because the saviour died for him, why not the woman, seeing he died for her also? Is he not a whole saviour, instead of half one? Those who hold it wrong for a woman to preach, would seem to make is appear so (Grant, 1984:219).

Lee correctly perceives that there is an ontological issue at stake. If Jesus Christ were a savour of men then it is true the maleness of Christ would be paramount. But if Christ is a saviour of all, then it is the humanity, the wholeness of Christ which is significant. Sojouner was aware of a tendency of some scholars and church leaders to link the maleness of Jesus and the Sin of Eve with the status of women and she has challenged this notion in her famed speech "Ain't I a woman"?

Grant would argue, as suggested by both Lee and Truth, that the significance of Christ is not his maleness, but his humanity. The most significant events of Jesus Christ were the life and ministry, the crucifixion and the resurrection. The significance of these events, in one sense, is that in them the absolute becomes concrete. God becomes concrete not only in the man Jesus, for he was crucified, but in the lives of those who will accept the challenges of the risen saviour the Christ.

For Lee, this meant that women could preach, for Truth, it meant that women could possibly save the world, for Grant (1984:220) it means today, this Christ, found in the experiences of black women is a black woman. The commitment that to struggle not only with symptoms (church structures, structures of society), as black women have done, but with causes (those beliefs which produce and re-enforce structure) yield deeper theological and Christological questions having to do with images and symbolism. Christ challenges us to ask new questions demanded by the context in which we find ourselves.

Another challenge for black women is that they must explore more deeply the question of what Christ means in a society in which class distinctions are increasing. If Christ is among "the least" then who are they? Because our forefathers were essentially poor by virtue of their race, there was no real need for them to of the emerging black middle class, we must ask what if the impact of class upon our lives and the lives of other poor black and third world women and men.

Another way of addressing the class issue in the church is to recognise the fact that although our race/sex analyses may force us to realise that blacks and women should share in the leadership of the church, the style of leadership and basic structures of the church virtually ensure the continuation of a privileged class.

Contemporary black women, in taking seriously the Christ mandate to be among the least must insist that they address all three aspects of black women's reality in their analysis. The challenge here for contemporary black women is to begin to construct a serious analysis which addresses the structural nature of poverty. Black women must recognise that racism, sexism and classism each have lives of their own, and that any one form of oppression is eliminated with the destruction of any other. Though they are interrelated, they must all be addressed.

The most interesting and important objective of black women is to do constructive Christology. This Christology must be a liberating one, for both the black women's community and the larger black community. A Christology which negates black, male humanity is still destructive to the black community. We must, therefore, take seriously only the usable aspects of the past.

To be sure, as black women receive these challenges, their very embodiment represents a challenge to white women. This embodiment of racism, sexism and classism says to white women that a holistic analysis is the minimal requirement for holistic theology. The task of black women then, is constructive.

> As they organise in this constructive task, they are also challenged to adopt the critical stance of Sojourners with respect to the feminist analysis as reflected in her comment: "I know that it feel a kind o'hissin' and ticklin like to see a coloured woman get up and tell you about things, and woman's rights. We have all been thrown down so low that nobody thought we ever get up again, but we have been long enough trodden now, we will come up again, and now I am

> here, I want to tell you a mite about women's rights and so I came out and said so. I am sitting among you to watch, one every once in a while I will come out and tell you what time of night it is (Grant 1989:222).

Womanist theology is constructed by women with a double vision, wishing to bring together the parish and the academy, the practical and theoretical dimensions of the Christian life. It uses black women's literature and symbols. African-American history and traditions in church and society are of great importance. Black women's experience of oppression, subjugation and exploitation leads to an emphasis on such political theological themes as survival and justice. There is greater emphasis of the black women's Jesus experienced in history, than on the historical Jesus. The spirit is central, but only recently, and with some trepidation, have some womanists begun to examine the relationship between black spirituality and sexuality.

Another worthwhile objective of womanist theology is the survival and community building and maintenance. The goal of this community building is, of course, to establish a positive quality of life - economic, spiritual, educational - for black women, men, and children. Their concern for community building and maintenance must ultimately extend to the entire Christian community and beyond that to the larger human community. Womanists must explore the peculiarities of black women's history and culture without being guided by what white feminists have already identified as women's issues (Williams 1993:81).

Another objective of womanist theology is to colourise feminism so that it also speaks the black women's tongue to include the suffering experience of black women, so that it tells the very truth of the black woman's historical existence in North America (Williams 1985:43).

Furthermore, a very important objective of womanist theology was according to Williams, to liberate themselves and their school children from oppressed relation to white-controlled American institutions where black children were discriminated against and under privileged in American schools dominated by white teachers.

For womanists, mothering and nurturing are also vitally important. In this sense, mothering goes beyond the mothering of own children as many black women mothered many children during the struggle.

Conclusion

According to Williams (1985:55), womanist theology would at least have three primary goals. These would be (1) liberation of women and the family simultaneously (2) establishing a positive quality of life for women and the family simultaneously (3) forming political alliances with other marginal groups struggling to be free of the oppression, imposed by white-controlled American Institutions. Hence, the black women's issues cited above emerge from these goals. Liberation of black women and black families involves survival, salvation of black people's spirits and equality between males and females. A positive quality of life is achieved through the redistribution of goods and services and new encounters with God. As they form the appropriate political alliances, black women fight supremacy, and class bias.

CHAPTER TWO

2. THE ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF FEMINIST THEOLOGY

"Feminism is in a way the sense of women perceiving themselves and their role in life in a radically new way because of the liberating influence of the Bible, can be traced back to the New Testament period itself" (Kretzschmar 1990:37-51). Since then, individual women such as Perpetuat who died in 203, the Abbes Hilda of Whitby who lived between 614-680, the Quakers Mary Fisher and Elizabeth Williams (1653), and Lady Huntington (active in England) are but a few examples of Christian women who challenged the clerical and male prejudices of their day. Twentieth century feminist theology, then, is not an entirely new phenomenon. Through out the ages, such women have sought to enable the church and society to break away from sinful patterns of sexist thought.

Already in 1840s founding mothers of freedom emerged with the writings which generally portrayed the typical women as a capable, intelligent human beings who knew their own interests. Feminist theology is a unique development of the Contemporary Feminism Movement. It is unique because, whereas feminism is not new, the theology of feminism is new and distinct from any past developments in the Feminist Movement.

Feminists in the nineteenth century America, in a rather sporadic way, addressed the issue under the larger umbrella of religion. Some women were able to see the relationship between religion and oppression of women. Other women merely employed feminist imagery to make religion more relevant for them.

During the nineteenth century the church, with remarkable success, resisted the impact of the women's movement. The resistance took the form of teachings on the virtues of womanhood lauding the feminine qualities of women as godly and God given. Grant (1984:14), described the indoctrination which women received regarding their role in the

church and family. Women populated the church by a majority as early as the mid-seventeenth century. They were kept in line, however, by the constant teaching that they were special having female values. According to Grant (1984:14), "they were seduced by the minister's teachings that they were of conscientious and prudent character, especially suited to religion, women became well indoctrinated in what was expected of them".

Cott (Grant, 1984:15) characterised the early nineteenth century religious treatment of women in this way, "No other institutions spoke to women and cultivated their loyalty so assiduously as the churches did". Quickened by religious anxiety and self-interest, the clergy gave unusual force to their formulations of women's roles in life. They pinned on women's domestic occupation and influenced their own best hopes. Their portrayal of women's roles grew in persuasive power because they overlapped with republican common places about the need for virtuous citizens for a successful republic. It gained intensity because it intersected with new interest in early childhood learning.

Ministers declared repeatedly that women's pious influence was not only appropriate to them but crucial for society.

In spite of their ecclesiastical/religious oppression, however, women from time to time did challenge the church at the point of its role in perpetuating such oppression. The speeches of Sara and Angeline Grimke as quoted by Grant (1989:15), directed to Christian women and advocating the equality of the sexes, elicited angry reactions from the clergy of the church. One church body responded to the work of the Grimke sisters with a proclamation that God condones the protected and dependent state of women. The General Association of the church wrote the following: "The power of women is her dependence, flowing from the consciousness of that weakness which God has given her for her protection, and which keeps her in those departments of life that form the character of individuals and of the nation" (Grant 1984:15).

In spite of these kinds of divinely-inspired attacks, women began to claim and articulate revelations to the contrary. Sarah Grimke as quoted by Grant affirmed that the appropriate duties and influence of women are revealed in the New Testament. In her words, "No one can desire more earnestly than I do that women may move exactly in the sphere which her creator has assigned her, and I believe her having been displaced from that sphere has introduced confusion in to the world" (Grant 1989:16). Grimke felt that the New Testament in its untarnished form can be used as a guide for women. Having been contaminated by the interpretations and translation of men, the Bible and commentaries there upon have been distorted especially with regards to women.

Grimke's position as quoted by Grant was obviously reformist. She was joined by many others who attempted to reform Christian and biblical dogma. By 1885 at the annual convention of the National Woman Suffrage Association a rather reformist resolution was proposed by what could be called the Christian apology contingent. They wrote:

> Whereas the dogmas incorporated in religious creeds derived from Judaism teaching that a woman was an after-thought in the creation, her sex a maternity a curse, are contrary to the law of God as revealed in nature, and to the precepts of Christ, and whereas these dogmas are an insidious poison, sapping the vitality of our civilization, blighting woman, and, through she, paralysing humanity, therefore is it resolved. That we call on the Christian ministry, as leaders of thought, to teach and enforce the fundamental idea of creation, that man was made in the image of God, male and female, and given equal rights over the earth, but none over each other. And furthermore, we ask their recognition of the scriptural declaration that, in the Christian religion, there is neither male nor female, bond nor free, but all are one in Christ Jesus (Grant 1984:16).

Though passage of this resolution is not indicated, its mere proposal reflected the growing belief that essentially, the problem regarding women is not with Christianity or the Bible, but with distortion of them.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton repudiated this view without an apology. She attributed the entire situation of women to the use of the Old and New Testament, and responded by editing and writing a commentary on the Bible which she entitled: *The woman's Bible*. All bodies religious, social and political, she argued, undergird and sustain the inferiority of women. She says that: "the canon and civil law, church and state, priests and legislators, all political parties and religious denominations have alike thought that woman was made after man, of man and for man, an inferior being, subject to man" (Grant 1989:17).

Stanton's position on religion was considered extreme for her time and was not widely shared. Women were afraid to join forces with her.

This reluctance contributed to the strength of the church's stifling of the progress of movement. Consequently, the issue in the church was not actively or consistently addressed. Radical and reformist feminists alike saw little possibility of change within the church. Thus, while the moral crusaders shied away from a fundamental examination of the church, the radicals simply assumed that religion was dead.

2.1 The Contemporary Secular Women's Liberation Movement

A significant aspect of contemporary feminism recaptures the spirit of nineteenth century feminists such as Elizabeth Candy Stanton, in identifying religion as the root of the oppression of women. This aspect of contemporary feminism consists of religious feminists who are engaging in systematic analysis of religion as the root of the oppression of women. Many feminists who have chosen to function within the realm of religion and even some who have moved outside of religion have made the important connection between legal, political, economic and social status of women and the image of women presented in religion. They have been able to relate the state of powerlessness of women in the society to the belief that woman was responsible for the relative powerlessness of man through the eating of the forbidden apple (the fall of man). More specifically, they

have been able to see the perceived connections made between the exclusion of women from leadership and the exclusion of women from the ranks of disciples of Jesus. Feminist Christology emerged in a context of radical struggles in the process toward the liberation of women from social and political as well as ecclesiastical oppression. Women began to analyse the various institutions which historically had oppressed them. A look at how women viewed the issues in the wider secular society and the church, and particularly in theology, will indicate how feminist theology and Christology emerged from women's experience. It will also indicate how they both function as an oppressive tool used against women.

2.2 Woman's Liberation - A Societal Movement

The second wave of the Women's Liberation Movement began during the early 1960s. The publication of The Feminine Mystique in 1963 by Betty Friedan represented the commencement of what Rothman (Grant 1984:18) has termed the era of the "woman as person". Friedan's thoughts represented the early part of this era. She advances the notion that American women, particularly middle-class women, suffer from a feminine mystique which forces them into feminine conformity. This means that they suffer from an identity crisis because of the general belief that their identity is merged into the identity of others such as husbands and children and children as wife and mother and, of course, housewife. The Feminine Mystique forces women to achieve, in fact to live, vicariously through men (husbands) and children. Friedan suggests that women can find fulfilment as wives and mothers only by fulfilling their own potentials as separate persons. To do this, she proposes that "women must adopt a new life plan which will reject the feminine mystique (Grant 1984:18). In this connection, she says that: "Ironically, the only kind of work which permits an able woman to realise her abilities fully, to achieve identity in society in a life plan that can encompass marriage and motherhood, is the kind that was forbidden by the Feminine Mystique, the lifelong commitment to an art or science, to politics or profession" (Grant 1989:19).

It is only when women are able to reject totally the Feminine Mystique that they can make the necessary serious professional commitment to any of these areas. Friedan and Grant (1989:19), therefore, suggest that women can achieve their own identities, goals and aspirations as persons without giving up marriage and family life. It is only full human beings that they will be able to put into perspective marriage and family life. Friedan states that as boys at Harvard or Yale or Columbia or Chicago go on from the liberal arts core to study architecture, medicine, law and science, girls must be encouraged to go on to make a life plan. It has been shown that girls with this kind of a commitment are less eager to rush into early marriage, less panicky about finding a man, more responsible for their sexual behaviour. Most of them marry of course, but on a much more mature basis. Their marriages then are not an escape but a commitment to themselves and society. If, in fact, girls are educated to make such commitments, the question of sex and when they marry will lose its overwhelming importance. It is the fact that women have no identity of their own that makes sex, live, marriage, and children seem the only and essential facts of women's lives.

It was Friedan's book along with various other events in the 1960s, which led to the development of the National Organisation of Women (NOW) in 1966. Another event leading to the development of NOW was the struggle of women for the inclusion and implementation of the sex clause in article or title vii of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Additionally, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's inability or refusal to enforce the provision of the Civil Rights act aided in producing the atmosphere for the emergence of the first Civil Rights Movement for women. The chief objective of NOW was that women be allowed to reach their full, human potential. Friedan expressed this aim as she wrote the first sentence of the statement of purpose of NOW which committed itself to take action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American Society now exercising all the privileges and responsibilities thereof, in truly equal partnership with men. The organisation took on such concerns as equal pay for equal work; economic independence for women; reform of family and societal structures.

Friedan admitted that women also had to confront their sexual nature and not deny or ignore it as earlier feminists had done. However, she argued that society had to be restructured so that women who happened to be the people who give birth, could make a humane, responsible choice of whether or not or when to have children and not be barred thereby from participating in society in their own right. This meant the right to birth control and safe abortion, the right to maternity leave and child care centres if women did not want to retreat completely from adult society during the child-bearing years, and the equivalent of a G.I. bill for retraining if women chose to stay home with the children. For it seemed to Friedan that most women would still choose to have children, though not so many if child rearing was no longer their only road to status and economic support a vicarious participation in life.

According to Grant (1989:21) the critical point of the argument is that women will be able to become professionals and yet be family persons, mothers and wives at the same time. Although, one could argue that the goals of Friedan and her followers in NOW were modest compared to what was to happen later, they represented, nonetheless, a remarkable beginning of a movement which was to become momentous. Young radical women attempted to radicalise NOW. The mild call for equality had met with so much resistance that some young radical women began to preach "Man hating-sex/class warfare". Rothman (Grant 1989:21) wrote that the women's movement had shifted from partnership to a war between the sexes. NOW had began in 1966 as a Civil Rights Organisation: in 1971, it was a Women's Liberation Organisation. The agenda, as well as the underlying assumptions, had changed. Many women were no longer interested in partnership with men. Rather they but were interested in liberation. To be full persons, women had to be liberated from the oppression and suppression of familiar and societal structures. The issue for many was no longer spacing children but the right to have no children. Similarly, no longer was the issue merely of abortion but of abortion on demand. In some expressions of the movement, for the first time, it appeared that women's interests, family interests and societal interests were in conflict.

A major part of the quest for liberation became expressed in the struggle for passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) a struggle which was to last for several years, ending temporarily in defeat.

2.3 The Woman's Movement Versus the Black Movement

There is much in common between the contemporary women's movement and the Black Movement just as there was in the Abolition Movement and the Women's Movement of the 19th century. In both periods, the Women's Movement was influenced by the earlier Black Movement. According to Grant (1984:20), Rothman suggests two ways in which this was true of the Contemporary Movement. First the language of the Black Civil Rights Movement was conciliation in its optimism and progressivism. Martin Luther king's dream was for brotherhood. He stressed searching for the togetherness of all the people. In a similar vein, women spoke of partnership, that is the togetherness of the sexes. Just as the Civil Rights Movement gave way to the Black Power Movement, the Women's Rights Movement gave way to the more radical Women's Liberation Movement.

Second in the Civil Right Movement serious challenges were made about the operating assumptions regarding the learning patterns of American children. Psychologists and educators began to challenge the notion that the structured IQ tests then used were culturally biassed towards middle-class, white children. It was further argued that the results of the tests were socially pre-determined.

In observing the performance differentials between blacks and whites, women began to look at the differentials between boys and girls and to assess the degree to which social expectations functioned in determining the results of the tests. One could argue, then, that just as the tests were unfair for blacks, they were like likewise unfair for women and did not, in fact could not, accurately test intelligence. Women were not only influenced

by the Black Movement but some activity began their civil rights involvement in that context and then moved to the Women's Movement. An account of the evolution from one movement to the other is given in an autobiographical manner by Evans in her book entitled *Personal Politics* (1979), in which she discusses the roots of women's liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the new left. Evans gives a history of her personal involvement and the involvement of other white women in the Black Movement. She portrayed these women as being similar to the nineteenth century white female abolitionist who saw the injustices of a racist society and was willing to volunteer her services for the Black Struggle toward liberation, but there was sexism, expressed and unexpressed, in organisations such as the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Southern Student Organisation Committee (SSOC), and Students for a Democratic Society. Fermenting under the surfaces of the activities of the women were the makings of a women's movement.

Building on their new strengths, looking consciously to new models both black and white, Southern white women in SNCC as early as 1960 sensed that the achievement of racial equality required fundamental changes in sex roles. To them the term "Southern lady" was an obscene epithet.

These women saw a relationship between racism and Southern Sexism. Racism propped up notions about white women and repression. However, because of some of the sexism of the Black Movement, they began to see themselves in a different light.

It was from this network of Southern women, whose involvement dated from the beginning of SNCC and who understood their commitment in the theological formulas of ultimate commitment, that the earliest feminist response emerged. Unfortunately the close relationship between the Black Movement and the Women's Movement still did not prevent racism from emerging in the White Women's Liberation Movement.

Consequently, black women, by and large, rather than existing with white women remained in the Black Movement.

As a result, many women eventually left the Black Movement and other new left movement and began to focus on self affirmation which was denied them even in those leftist movements. They committed themselves to political-social strategies for full participation in the human race.

2.4 Contemporary Ecclesiastical Women's Liberation Movement

As women in the larger society had begun to agitate and advocate liberation for women, women in the church began to do the same. The churches, it was discovered, were just as the larger society, patriarchal institutions and therefore women began to challenge the traditional structures of the church.

Women within and across denominational lines have formulated organisation and caucuses, all designed to foster full participation of women in the life and ministry of the church. For the most part this was, and continues to be difficult struggle in the denomination. An examination of the contemporary movements in several predominately white denomination will serve to document this struggle.

2.4.1 Roman Catholic Tradition

The Catholic Church has consistently maintained its rigid prohibitions against the leadership of women. The contemporary women's struggle in the Catholic Church has become centred on the development of the organisation called Women's Ordination Conference. It was in November of 1975 that the church primarily women of the church met in Detroit, Michigan, on the question of the ordination of women in the Roman Catholic Church. This meeting led to the establishment of the women's ordination

conference, which met in Chicago in 1976 to discuss the ordination of women to a renewed priestly ministry.

Fuel was added to the fire in January 1977 with the Vatican Declaration that women could not be the image of Jesus in the priesthood. According to this declaration, only the male priest could be the image of Christ, that is, only he can act in ***persona Christi***, to achieve the desired result, that the faithful perceives in him the image of Christ, because he in fact represents Christ.

It is this ability to represent Christ that St Paul considered as characteristic of his Apostolic Function (cf II Corinthians 5:20, Galatians 4:14). The supreme expression of this representation is found in the altogether special form it assumes in the celebration of the Eucharist, which is the source and the centre of church unity, the sacrificial meal in which the people of God are associated in the sacrifice of Christ. The priest, who alone has the power to perform it, then acts not only through the effective power conferred on him by Christ, but in persona Christi, taking the role of Christ, to the point of being his very image, when he pronounces the words of consecration.

The same natural resemblance is required for persons as for things. When Christ's role in the Eucharist is to be expressed sacramentally, there would not be this natural resemblance which must exist between Christ and his minister if the role of Christ were not taken by a man, in such a case it would be difficult to see in the minister the image of Christ, for Christ himself was and remains a man.

The central point of the declaration was that the church in fidelity to the example of the Lord, does not consider herself authorised to admit women to priestly ordination.

This declaration put the issues into perspective for many women, increasing sensitivities as well as anger in many conscious Roman Catholics, because it seemed to close the door

on the ordination question for women. This move led to the planning and implementation of the Baltimore Conference in 1978 with its focus on "New Woman, New Church, New Priestly Ministry", to call the church to justice for women in the elimination of the sin of sexism from the church. Roman Catholic women, however, have been unable to break down the thick oppressive wall built in their church.

2.4.2 The Episcopal Tradition

On December 15, 1973 at the Cathedral of St John the Divine in New York, ten Deacons were presented for ordination, but only five were accepted for ordination. The five men were ordained, and the five women were not allowed ordination. The struggle was intensified as a result of this refusal to ordain the five women by the church.

The culmination of the struggle of women in the Episcopal Church occurred on July 29 1974, at the church of the advocate in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, when eleven women were ordained by four Bishops in violation of church law and tradition. Prior to this "illegal" and controversial ordination service, women have been allowed to enter the order of deacon since 1970, but by no means could they be fully fledged elders in the Episcopal Church.

The story of the struggle in the Episcopal Church is told in the autobiographical work of Carter Heyward in *Priest Forever*, as she discusses what might be called "the making of a priest". As one of the eleven women ordained at Philadelphia at the Church of the Advocate in 1974, her personal journey is a testimony of the struggle in the Episcopal Church.

Prior to that service, several ordinands had been in conversation with some of the bishops of the church. Heyward speaks often of her correspondence with her friend, Bishop of New York, Paul Moore, especially after having been denied ordination by her own

bishop. The women organised an ordination service to be performed by three bishops, two of whom were retired. The ordination did not lead to an enthusiastic acceptance of the women by the general church.

Instead, women were asked to refrain from performing any priestly duties until the matter had been resolved by the general church. In an emerging meeting of the bishops in August 15, 1974, the bishops resolved to consider the matter of the ordination of the women but not without condemning the participants of the "illegal" service and calling upon them to wait for the general church connection decision. Because of the action, Heyward and others decided to terminate their agreement to refrain from priestly functions. Agitation continued, but in 1976 the General Assembly of the Episcopal Church granted women the right to full ordination.

2.4.3 The United Methodist Tradition

The recent struggles in the United Methodist Church were not centred on the ordination issue and consequently did not take the same activist form as in the Episcopal Church. Women in this church body received the right to ordination in 1956. But in spite of this fact, the structural nature of sexism in the church had meant that still women did not share equally in the programme and policy making channels of the church. Around 1968, the Women's Division of the Board of Missions of the Methodist Church petitioned the church for the creation of a study of the extent to which women are involved at all structural levels in programme and policy-making channels and agencies of the United Methodist Church. The 1970 General Conference approved this study commission and consequently its work commenced.

The study commission functioned with the following purpose:

1. To make a study of the extent to which women are involved in programme and policy-making decisions at all levels of the United Methodist Church.
2. To review the language of the Book of Discipline in the light of the issue of the role of women in the denomination.
3. To develop an awareness of the issue of the involvement of women in the life of the denomination, the factors contributing to the present situation and the changes which are needed.
4. To formulate some recommendations to the United Methodist Church and its constituent parts to enable and facilitate the involvement of women in the life and work of the work (Grant 1989:28).

The findings of the study were perhaps revealing for some and served merely as verification of previous empirical observations for others.

It was documented that, on the connectional level women were concentrated, in fact relegated, to traditional women's areas of work rather than the top leadership positions of the church. It reported that, "the participation of women in the structures of the denomination still reflects the traditional patterns to a large extent women were found in the membership and on the staffs of agencies which relate to missions and education, the historic channels for women's work. The business functions, either on the general or the annual conference level were largely reserved for men. Activities having to do with some aspects of the professional ministry, boards of ministries, pension activities, education and recruitment of clergy, were almost exclusively the domain of men" (Grant 1984:29).

On the local church organisations level, the same was documented, "women were found in those organisational activities which have been rather traditionally ascribed to them, namely education, missions and the council of ministers. Men predominated in the Administrative Board, the Committee on Finance, the Board of Trustees and the Pastor

Parish Relations Committee, all of which are crucial in determining policy and direction for the local congregation" (Grant 1984:30).

Now, participation of women in the ministry represents a particular problem. For even though the rights to full ordination were granted in 1956, the rights to full participation in the clergy, that is, the professional ministry has not become actualised.

The study found the following: a number of research reports have indicated that women clergy face obstacles in their professional careers which are not placed before men. There is an underlying prejudice against having women as clergy, particularly in the parish ministry. Women are harder to place because many congregations do not desire a woman as a pastor. In relation to a recent research project, the bishops of the United Methodist Church were asked to comment on issues relating to the appointment of women. Twelve of the thirty eight respondents indicated that problems arose because of the history of male domination in professional ministry. Twelve pointed to the special problems which related to the placement of married women clergy. The bishops also indicated that many congregations are unwilling to accept a woman minister. Supporting evidence of this type of bias can be found in almost all studies of the professional ministry which have dealt with the topic of women clergy.

The study made specific recommendations for the advancement of women's participation in the church. This included the establishment of a commission on the role and status of women in the United Methodist Church. The recommendations to and action of the 1972 General Conference ranged from reform in legislation to reform in language.

Agitation on various levels continued in the church until 1980, when the first woman bishop, Margaret Matthews, was elected. In 1984 two other women, Leontyne Kelly (a black woman) and Judith Craig were elected bishops. The struggle of the liberation and

full participation continued in order to maintain successes and to make further advancements.

2.4.4 The Presbyterian Tradition

In "In but still out": Women in the church, Elizabeth Howell Verdesi gives a history of the struggles of women in the United Presbyterian Church in the USA. Women, she feels, gained formal ecclesiastical status in 1956 with the achievement of the right to ordination. The other significant event relative to the status of women in the United Presbyterian Church in the USA was the election of Thelma Adair as the first black woman Moderator of the General Assembly in 1971. This event represented the culmination of the journey towards ecclesiastic equality.

Towards the end of the 1960s women's issues began to receive special attention in the general church. In 1967, a special committee was formulated for a study of the status and participation of women in society and in the judicatories and agencies of the church. The report of this committee, in 1969 resulted in the commissioning of a three-year study. After the study, the task force on women reported nine working principles which basically affirmed the equality of women and the need for wholeness in responsible relationship between men and women in the church. Nineteen-seventy-three brought about the formulation of the council on women and the church whose duties related specifically to women's advocacy.

Other activities in the United Presbyterian Church in the USA included special studies in fields of theological education and investigations into various kinds of supports (financial and others) available to women as well as mandates for representative participation of women in various agencies and organisational bodies of the church. Representative participation was dealt with within the area of employment as well.

As a reflection of the need to deal with foundational causes of the situation of women, this church addressed the matter of language. In 1975 in a report entitled "Language about God-Opening the Door", the church committed itself to a study of cultural and theological implications of changing language about God. This was one of the first ecclesiastical bodies to study seriously the issue of the language as it relates to women's oppression. However, its report was never implemented.

With the 1983 merger into the Presbyterian Church (USA) of the Untied Presbyterian, USA and the Presbyterian Church US, there was some fear that the relative conservatism of the Southern body would endanger the gains made by women in the Northern body.

These four representative traditions provide some insight into the struggles of white Christian women in the churches. Likewise, the same spirit of justice and freedom moved among women in other religious institutions such as the seminary.

2.4.5 Women's Liberation in the Seminary

The resurgence of the feminist movement in the church and society brought about an increase in the enrolment of women in seminaries. Women found themselves as a minority in the man's world of the seminary, an often hostile environment. They were often not taken seriously, neither in the classroom context nor in their ministries.

Susan Coperhauer Barrabee in her *Education for Liberation: Women in the Seminary*, discusses her experiences as a woman seminarian. She observes that women suffer from distorted images in the seminary context. Either they are husband hunting or they are escaping life.

The institutional responses to women's presence in the seminaries were similar to individual responses. For the purpose of support building and collective lobbying, women began to form caucuses on seminary campuses across the country.

Once committed to defining themselves as such, they quickly started to confront the administrative, faculty and student structures with the need to do some self-examining and changing around the woman question. They met with every type of response from mutual concern to ridicule. In the main they run into a few nervous laughs and a brick wall of patronising tolerance. Of course any of these responses is accompanied by indignant denial of discrimination against women, in recruitment procedures, financial aid, job placement and so on, but until they see some real activity in these areas for women activity which results in their showing up in their campuses and in their parishes in much larger numbers, signs of officially neutral intention are still of no comfort.

Forced with a real sense of powerlessness and self-negation, women in the seminary saw a need to create a context in which women not only participate in the process of consciousness raising, but also claim the power of theologising and redefining theology. Grailville became the symbol of women theologising. Doing theology at Grailville began with a church women united conference in 1972, out of which emerged a booklet entitled *Women and Theology*. Subsequently Grailville became the quasi-institutional expression of women theologising. Since 1974 Seminary Quarter at Grailville had offered a six-week programme primarily for women in theological education. Participants lived together in the community of Grailville, shaping their own learning, asking questions of ten treated as peripheral in their Seminary Curriculum, and moving from a passive to an all active learning stance.

Within the traditional seminary walls women began mobilisation for action to increase the presence of women in seminary. This presence was not only a numerical presence, for women were steadily increasing in enrollment as students. But this presence which

was being sought what in terms of women faculty as well as theological curriculum development. Women lobbied for the hiring of women and especially of those with the feminist perspective. What ranged from sporadic individual causes of full-fledged women's studies programme began to emerge in the seminary context.

Perhaps one of the most substantive and significant programmes was the "Research/ Resource Associate in Women's Studies Programme", established at Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts. The programme was established to encourage and support research of women, to provide course offerings in women's studies at Harvard Divinity School, and to create a presence of women at the faculty level.

In 1980, this programme was upgraded and became the women's studies in Religious programme with the following as its purpose: Its purpose is to encourage and guide the development of women's studies in the various fields of religion. Such scholarship promises to transform the study of human religious experience. Through the application of gender as a primary category of analysis, it explores women's distinctive religious experience and perspectives and examines male-centeredness and sexism in religious traditions (Grant 1984:35).

Other seminaries have responded to the demands of women in different ways. For example, at Union Theological Seminary in New York, while there was an increase in the number of courses in women studies, the number of women faculty was increased from two full-time women to four full-time women from 1972-1981. In addition to these full-time appointments, one or two other women received part-time appointment (Grant 1982:35).

On an interseminary level, around 1972, women organised an annual Women's Interseminary Conference which met, and continued to meet, on different seminary campuses across the country. These women organised to identify primary needs of

women in the seminary context and to strategies ways and means of addressing those needs. Involved in consciousness-raising, intellectual growth in feminist studies, and the creation of support structures for women in seminary, the conference became a significant reality in the lives of women seminarians (Grant 1982:36).

Most recently, twenty-one women seminarians meeting in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in June of 1980, proposed the formation of what is presently known as "The Feminist Theological Institute, Inc", for the primary purpose of providing a resource for feminist education, advocacy for women and sister celebrations. The institute professes to be for women who are unapologetically both feminist and religious. This resource and networking agency is interested in justice for all women. By employing a feminist theological critique, these women seek to actualise their commitment to working together for fundamental changes in social, economic, political and religious systems, and to furthering women's survival, growth, self-image and creativity.

The concern for feminist theology is most concentrated in the seminary context. It is here that feminist thought as a theological discipline has received more serious, consistent and passionate treatment. Women have begun to articulate their experience theologically.

One significant point to be noted from the above discussion is that it is easy to observe the remarkable absence of black women in these developments. In the larger societal context, when the white women left the Black Movement, black women, by and large remained with what may be called their first allegiance. Even when some black women moved into the feminist circles, they clearly illustrated their primary concern as racism. Whereas, some white women began to fight both sexism and racism, the agenda which had to be adopted by black women centred not only around the sexism of black and white men but also the racism by white men and women. The reality of racism in the Feminist Movement is testified to by the conspicuous absence of large numbers of black women in the women's movement, and by the establishment of such organisations as National

Black Feminist Organisation founded in 1973. The significance of this organisation is that it challenged the racist attitudes and behaviour in the women's movement without acquiescing to the sexism in the Black Movement and without abandoning concern for the latter.

In the church and seminaries as women's groups arose, black women in overt ways as with Theressa Hoover in Church Women United and covert ways as in the formal and informal Black Women's Caucuses at seminars across the nation challenged both the subtle and not so subtle racism of white women as reflected in their organisation and attitudes. Many of the problems and frictions which existed between white and black women were evidenced on the seminary campuses. As in the larger movement, the agenda of Christian white women was suspected by black women because of inability and sometimes unwillingness of these white women to eliminate racism from their communities. The theology which then emerged did so primarily out of Christian white women's experience with only token nuances given to black women. The significance of this problematic issue will be addressed further.

2.5 Conclusions

It was around the 1960s that American women started to identify, redefine and express their position and rights, starting from the family, moving into the society and its different fields such as politics, the work situation and social structures.

Betty Friedman was one of the first to describe American women in the language of the empty vessel. In her 1963 book, The Feminine Mystique, Friedman spoke of women as empty, infantile creatures, lacking a core of human self (Friedman 1994:28). In her eyes, the women of her generation were anonymous biological robots, paralysed by their sense of emptiness, non-existence and nothingness.

According to Phillis Bird, it was the disparity between the egalitarian ideals and pervasive male dominance that accounted for the depth of anger in the new wave of feminism and led to more radical analysis of the problem. The sense of betrayal and delusion after earlier victories added an element of bitterness and suspicion.

The first phase of women's struggle for equality rights was in the area of education where only two centuries ago prevailing opinion held that education was either harmful to women's constitution or detrimental to their domestic responsibilities. Women used two arguments to gain equal education for women, namely (1) They emphasised equality of souls, equality of natural endowments and destiny and (2) the needs of the Republican Government that ladies might instruct their sons in the principles of liberty and government.

A major impetus to change women's legal position came from a change in economics. The Bible played an important role in the religion and politics of the day. It could simply be dismissed. It provided the ammunition for anti-feminist arguments and exercised its power over women as well as men.

From 1895 the problem has been that the only small group of females continued to be trained in the Biblical Studies, women in the academy did not use their skills to read the Bible from the feminist perspective. According to women's Bible Commentary page xiv, it was not until 1964 that a female professor at Biblical Literature, Margaret Brackenburg Crook, published a study on the status of women in Judaism and Christianity, entitled "Women and Religion".

The Women's Movement of the 1960s and 1970s and the increasing number of women attending seminaries renewed interest in what it might mean to read the Bible self consciously as a woman. Books such as Letty Russell's (1985) *The Liberating Word* and

Phyllis Trible's *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* introduced many women and men to the new possibilities opened up by Feminism for reading and understanding the Bible.

With increasing self-confidence and sophistication, feminist study of the Bible has blossomed to become one of the most important new areas in contemporary biblical research. Over the last twenty-five years biblical scholarship by women has come into its maturity. Not only are women prominent in the discussions of traditional topics in biblical studies, but the new questions women have posed and the new ways of reading that women have pioneered have challenged the very way biblical studies are done, for example, women were convinced that feminism and social justice are inextricably linked.

During the nineteenth century in North America, when women read the Bible, they had to be careful of the existence of an explicit patriarchal bias but also for evidence of a more subtle androcentrism in the world view of the authors of the Bible. The problem was brought only by the fact that the Bible was used as being an instrument of patriarchy to oppress and sideline the women. This problem occasioned of the emergence of feminist theology. The forgotten or lost texts that portray women in a different light are brought into the discussion. The main aim of feminism is to counteract texts (for example Genesis 2, Genesis 3, Ephesians 5) used against women. It also looks to the Bible in general for a theological perspective that offers a critique of patriarchy.

In short feminist theology is opposed to sexism, that is, discrimination against women (whether by men or other women) on the basis of their sex or gender.

CHAPTER THREE

3. THE ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF WOMANIST THEOLOGY

3.1 Origin

According to Delores Williams (1993:29), Womanist Theology emerged from North America during nineteenth century as a movement to fight against white feminism which had a strong influence on American Government which controlled all the sectors affecting all the social structures to reinforce the oppression of black people especially black women and black families. It started as a movement reacting against the oppression of women by black males and white men and white women. Womanist Theology began with the experience of black women as its point of departure. This experience included not only black women's activities in the larger society but also in the churches. A review of the literature reveals that black women speak to them and not to impose upon it vocabulary and ideas that come from beyond the cultures in which black women live (Williams 1995:112).

It becomes obvious from Williams' experience that she was a feminist theologian. This means that Womanist Theology was born out of Feminist Theology in response to Feminist Theology's shortcomings and silence about black women's experience. From the following example, one would deduce that Womanist Theology was a sort of Supplementary Theology to Feminist Theology. When Williams was a graduate student at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. A group of Christian women from the Black Community of Harlem invited her to speak to them about feminism and Feminist Theology. When she had finished speaking, one woman stood up and addressed her: "Honey, I want to say something about this feminism... This all reminds me of the day I went into a fancy dress shop downtown and saw a real pretty dress. The colours in the dress blended right. The design was modern and fashionable. The buttons in front

looked real pretty with the material. Everything about that dress looked just right. There was only one problem ... The dress was size five, and I wear size twenty. The sales lady told me that shop did not carry no dress over size thirteen. I can sew real good, but I knew there was no way for me to alter that dress to make it fit me. Now, that my point, honey. This Feminism and Feminist Theology is real pretty, but there just ain't enough in it to fit me. And what I'm wondering is, if you black feminist try to make it fit me, will you still have the same thing" (Williams 1995:113).

This example of a dress creates the impression that Womanist Theology is the product of black feminist theologians. It was formed as an alteration of Feminist Theology in order to fit and address the needs of Black Community especially women, and that there is not enough focus in Feminist Theology. This gave birth to Womanist Theology. Experiences of a similar nature led Williams to concentrate her search for theological resources in the everyday lives of African-American women who live, work and die in the context of black community life.

It was this incident that alerted Williams and her white feminist friends that there was a world of cultural difference between them, which was bound to make a difference in how they identified issues, experienced the world, even named themselves and their reality. This example made it clear to Williams that some women in the Black Community at the grass roots saw value in feminism and Feminist Theology but doubted that it was applicable to their life-situation, and that there were cultural differences between black and white women's worlds that feminist perspectives might not be able to negotiate.

According to Grant this movement is a tri-dimensional in its focus on racism, sexism, and classism. However, it may be argued that womanism is actually two dimensional in the sense that classism and racism can be connected together to form one major dimension. I am basing my argument on the fact that not all black women are poor and not all the

white women are very rich. There are among black women those who are so rich that they cannot be affected by classism.

3.2 A New Name

Black women started to take part in the new spelling of their theological name from "Feminist" to "Womanist" Theologians (Williams 1995:113) and these women had the following reasons to change the name:

3.2.1 There was tension between how African-American women defined women's experiences and how they thought white feminist wanted black women's experiences defined. In their understanding of women's experience, African-American women included both their struggle alongside all women in the women's rights movement and their experience with black men in the liberation struggle for all black-Americans: females, males and children. "Black" sociologists such as Elsa Barkley Brown criticised white feminists for not wanting to include black women's racial experience as women's experience and for not wanting to include race among women's issues. Black liberation theologian Jacquelyn Grant also criticised white feminist theologians in the USA for not devoting time and energy to eradicating racism.

3.2.2 Some black women had reservations about white feminist definitions of patriarchy as the primary cause of all the oppression women experience. They doubted that this description had enough material in it to define adequately the kind of systematic oppression black women experience in the USA. They felt they needed a description that not only identified men as oppressive decision-makers and functionaries managing the system controlling their lives but also was very clear about the participation of upper-class women with upper-class men in the exploitation of black women's labour, especially black female domestic workers.

Most definitions of patriarchy provided in the USA were silent about white men and white women of every social class working together to maintain white supremacy and privilege.

African-American women who had travelled to other parts of the world say that in countries where a light-skinned and a dark-skinned population live together, the former usually oppress the latter. Black women discovered a global culture of whiteness that was systemic, perpetrated through every institution in such societies. Its language was racial, economic and cultural imperialism, its methodology the imposition of white Western order.

Black women did not know where white feminist women in the USA stood in relation to this global culture of white over black and white privilege, but many feared that the leadership in the feminist movement in church and society adhered to a prophesy made in 1903 by the Southern US white feminist Belle Kearney: "Just as surely as the North of the USA will be forced to the South for the nation's salvation, just so surely will the South be compelled to its Anglo-Saxon women as the medium through which to retain the supremacy of the white race over the African" (Williams 1995:114).

African-American women who had travelled around the world had discovered that there are many forms of "Master and Mistress" rule. Patriarchy is only one way for the powerful to control the powerless. In African-American community there were also women who, with black men, participated in the oppression of other women. Black women needed additional language to name and describe the ways of "Master and Mistress" rule they had experienced over the years.

3.2.3 Many African-American women became womanist theologians because they needed their own theological voice to affirm different cultural foundations for

identical assertions made by both feminist and black women who later became womanists. An example is Rosemary Radford Ruether's normative principle of the "full humanity of women". A womanist affirmation of this principle is based on a cultural foundation of black resistance that white American women neither have nor need.

Ruether's statement helps womanist theologians to resist the claim, heard continuously for more than a century in the USA, "that black people are animals and not humans" (Williams 1995:115).

Since white women have not experienced such a continuous attack on their humanness based on their race, their affirmation of Ruether's principle could be based upon their resisting the more "elevated" accusation that women, because of their sex, are not in the image of God. This accusation was used in the church to support the subordination of women, but it was not used socially or by "Christian" leaders to define white women as beasts.

Black women were so defined, and so womanist theologians, in asserting "the full humanity of women", are resisting and denying a negative idea about all black humanity that prevails in the USA even to this day, in addition to resisting the contention that women are not in the image of God.

3.2.4 Living and working among the poor, some black women became womanist theologians as they struggled to do God-talk which emerged out of that social, cultural and historical context. They tried to produce theology whose construction vocabulary and issues took seriously the everyday experience, language and spirituality of women. This kind of struggle needed its own theological ideas, framework and vocabulary.

3.2.5 African-American women could not limit their concerns, definitions, struggles and goals to the survival, liberation and well-being of women. The entire African-American family - mother, father, children and black kinsfolk - was oppressed and confronted by systemic violence. Feminist observations about the growing "feminisation of poverty" were astute, but not much mention was made of the thousands of homeless, jobless, poor black men and black families (fathers, mothers and children) living on the streets of the USA (Ortega 1995:116). Theological attention was also not being given to the violence destroying African-American communities caused mostly by drug-trafficking, which is controlled by non-black forces. Young black people, especially young black men, were being killed at an alarmingly high rate. Numerous black women were falling victims to drug addiction, and their rate of incarceration had increased dramatically. Black people claimed the black family was under siege by drugs and poverty. African-American women needed a theology conscious of these facts at every moment. Black people's survival was at risk, but no Christian theology (feminist and black liberation theologies included) had made survival one of its primary issues.

Black women also needed a theology that was conscious of the sexism in the African-American community. In 1979 Jacquelyn Grant wrote an article in which she claimed that black women are "invisible in black theology". In examining black theology it is necessary to make one of two assumptions: (1) either black women have no place in the enterprise, or, (2) black men are capable of speaking for us. Both of these assumptions are false and need to be discarded. They arise out of a male-dominated culture which restricts women to certain areas of the society. In such a culture, men are given the warrant to speak for women on all matters of significance. It is no accident that all of the recognised black theologians are men (Ortega 1995:116).

Other black female theologians began to recognise the qualitative difference between the experience of black women and of black men even though they both experienced racial oppression in the Unites States. The surrogacy experience provides a different lens through which to envision the task of womanist theology and provided different questions to be asked about God's relation to the world.

African-American female theologians could not separate racism and sexism if they were to take seriously black women's experience in North America. When this compound oppression determines the way black female theologians understand reality, they often imagine a whole new world and see issues differently from black male theologians. And since poor black women were a major concern for African-American female theologians, they also had to be attentive to a "triple oppression" affecting poor women's lives - race, sex and class.

3.3 Cultural Factors

A significant cultural factor, which provided the name "womanist" and some important clues for the development of womanist theology, is the work of the African-American poet and novelist Alice Walker. The word "womanist" appeared in the title of her book *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens Womanist Prose*, published in 1983.

According to Walker, womanist theology is something which found its origin in the cultural codes like mother-daughter advice. These are words, beliefs, and behavioural patterns of a people that must be deciphered before meaningful communication can happen cross culturally. "Black mothers have passed on wisdom for survival - in the white world, in the black community, and with men - for as long as anyone can remember" (King 1993:78). Female slave narratives, folk tales, and some contemporary black poetry and prose reflect this tradition. Some of it is collected in "Old Sister's Advice to her Daughters", in the Book of Negro Folklore.

Not only did Walker's definition of a womanist accomplish what feminist and black theologians had not to provide an image of black women's experience in their works. She had also offered tools for the analysis of culture in the United States, so that black women's culture, experience and history could be lifted from obscurity into visibility. At last black female theologians found some of the "material needed", in the words of the black woman in the story of a black woman in the dress shop mentioned above, to make a theology of women's experience which "fit" black women.

These cultural codes and their corresponding traditions are valuable resources for indicating and validating the kind of data upon which womanist theologians can reflect as they being black women's social, religious, and cultural experiences into the discourse of theology, ethics, biblical and religious studies. Female slave narratives, imaginative literature by black women, autobiographies, the work by black women in academic disciplines, and the testimonies of black church women will be authoritative sources for womanist theologians. Walker's choice of context suggests that womanist theology can establish its lines of continuity in the black community with non-bourgeois traditions less sexist than the black power and black nationalist traditions.

Walker provides an introduction to black womanhood that affirms mothers and children and is grounded in African-American culture. She situates her definition of a womanist in a family context: a mother giving advice to her female child. Inasmuch as the father is not mentioned, one can assume that this may be a single-parent family like so many black families in the USA. Walker characterises a womanist (which also includes the mother) as being serious and being in charge.

Walker's definition describes how the African-American women are placed culturally across class boundaries. She is careful not to emphasise higher education, which often establishes a black elite class no longer able to communicate with black people who do not have university education.

Walker has provided the cultural themes womanist theologians needed to unearth black women's experience and history embedded deeply in androcentric US culture, white and black. These cultural themes are: family, with female relationships emphasised; single parenthood; women's intellectual pursuit ("wanting know"); "colourism", which is the foundation of racism; women's leadership roles; women's resistance patterns; the objects of women's love (the folks, food, roundness, nature, dance, hospitality, men, women and the spirit); sexual preference; women's community work with men in survival and liberation struggle; and the organic relation between womanist and feminist.

In this folk context, some of the black, female-centred cultural codes in Walker's definition (e.g.), "Mama, I am walking to Canada and I am taking you and a bunch of slaves with me" (King 1993:79), point to folk heroines like Harriet Tubman, whose liberation activity earned her the name "Moses of her people". This allusion to Tubman directs womanist memory to a liberation tradition in black history in which women took the lead, acting as catalysts for the community's revolutionary action and for social change. Retrieving this often hidden or diminished female tradition of catalystic action is an important task for womanist theologians and ethicists.

Their research may well reveal that female models of authority have been absolutely essential for every struggle in the black community and for building and maintaining the community's institutions.

3.4 Social and Educational Factors

As more black women were coming into seminaries for theological training at all levels. Many were attempting to prepare for a vocation that brought together the parish and the academy, the practical and theoretical dimensions of Christian life. Women who had this double vision took the lead in "birthing" womanist theology.

Through community education, training in secular universities, and seminary studies black women became acquainted with models of black female leaders from the past who had been active in community ministry even though they were refused ordination, among them Jarena Lee and Zilpha Elaw, who made a powerful impact upon the nineteenth-century societies in which they lived and worked. "They became subjects of their histories rather than objects people used, and they told in spiritual autobiographies of mystical encounters with God that changed their lives and sustained their activism in the community" (Ortega 1995:117). The work of Lee, Elaw and other unordained black women represents early manifestations of "The Church without Walls", which has become the metaphor for the work of lay, grassroots womanist theologians like Betty Bolden.

Acquaintance with these nineteenth-century foremother gave twentieth-century black women the inspiration and faith that they could also be effective community agents for social change. They could work simultaneously for black people's rights and for women's rights. God would give them strength just as God has given their foremothers strength for the struggle.

The African-American social and cultural revolutions of the 1950s and 1960s have emphasised a communal way of thinking and acting which obscured black women's oppression and black male sexism. The emphasis was on black liberation, articulated and led by black men who gave little or no thought to black women's issues or their absence from leadership roles in the struggle. The second wave of feminism gave some black women a public forum in which to articulate their experiences of oppression, isolation and violation.

Secular black female scholars, influenced by the feminist movement, began to uncover African-American women's imaginative literature and history, including the work of black female theologians who considered their religion to be a power-source sustaining

their activism. The writings of nineteenth-century black women like Ida Wells Barnett, Mary Church Terrel, Anna Julia Cooper and Maria Stewart were resurrected from obscurity and became sources for theological reflection, helping to pave the way for the birth of womanist theology, according to Williams (1995:118).

3.5 Theological Factors and Cultural Themes

Various womanist theologians have been influenced by Walker's "cultural themes" as they articulated their theological positions. For example, Kelly Brown Douglas an ordained Episcopal minister teaching at Haward Divinity School in Washington D.C., presents black women as the face of the Black Christ: "A womanist portrayal of the Black Christ avails itself of a diversity of symbols and icons. These symbols and icons are living symbols and icons as Christ is the living Christ. That is, womanist portrayals of the Black Christ endeavour to lift up those persons, especially black women, how are a part of the black past and present, who have worked to move the black community towards wholeness. These portrayals of Christ suggest, for instance, that Christ can be seen in the face of a sojourner Truth, a Harriet Tubman, or as each one struggled to help the entire black community survive and become whole.

"Seeing Christ in the faces of those who were and are actively committed to the wholeness of the black community suggests that the Black Christ is present in the black community wherever people are engaged in a struggle for that community's wholeness according to Williams (1995:12)". It challenges black people to participate inactivities that advance the unity and freedom of their community. In addition to highlighting the presence of Christ in those who work toward black wholeness, a womanist Black Christ will consistently lift up the presence of Christ in the faces of the poorest black women.

This emphasis on wholeness, survival and commitment to the community's struggle recalls some of the cultural themes Walker articulates and influences the kind of Christology with more emphasis on Christ in history than on the historical Jesus. In addition to this cultural influence, political factors and politically influenced theological factors have brought womanist theology to life.

3.6 Political Factors and Political Theological Factors

The cultural revolutions in the US black community in the 1960s with their "black is beautiful" motif, gave all black Americans appreciation and pride rather than shame in their blackness. Black Americans searched their African heritage and found a new beauty in African culture - in art, in hair styles, in fabrics and clothing, in jewellery. This African-American aesthetic, with its emphasis on valuing African and blackness, could be used to assess American culture to discover the political use of blackness by the white, dominant culture.

Some womanist analysis showed how the media and other culture-generating sources in the USA had degraded the colour black for centuries, keeping black people outside the economic and political mainstream of American life and implanting in the national psyche the idea of the moral and intellectual inferiority of black people.

Everyday language reinforces the idea of the inferiority of black and the superiority of white: angel food cake is white, devil's food cake dark; black mail is illegal; the US economic crash in 1873 was referred to as Black September; the great depression began with a stock market crash on Black Friday, the steep fall in stock prices in 1987 on Black Monday; Protestant Congregations continue to sing "Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow", which the colour white with purity and perfection; to be blacklisted or blackballed means to be excluded by others, from a job, organisation or social group perceived as desirable (Williams 1995:121).

The national consciousness is thus saturated with the idea of black as bad and white as good. So when black Americans publicly proclaimed the "black is beautiful" aesthetic, black people were inspired with a new courage to live their political and religious lives affirming the goodness of blackness.

"Out of the political and cultural affirmation of a black aesthetic, black liberation theology came to life, with its claims of the blackness of God and God's preference for poor black people" (Williams 1995:121). This was a stepping-stone for black female theologians on the way to the development of womanist theology. The works of James H Cone and James Deotis Roberts were especially important for giving black Christians a renewed sense of God's identification with the black struggle for freedom in the late twentieth century. "Cone and Roberts used a language honest and powerful enough to express the depth of pain black people had experienced because of racism in North America" (Ortega 1995:121).

But even as black women affirmed the racial analysis of Cone, Robert and other black male theologians, they knew there was not enough material in black liberation theology to make it fit black women's experience. Black male theologians provided only masculine images of God. Their illustrations of the character of racial oppression in the United States were drawn primarily from male authors and from male experience. Black women's intellectual, cultural, political, aesthetic and social ideas had not been used by black male theologians to construct the ideas in black liberation theology. Womanist theology had to include more than an analysis of white racism.

"Similarly, feminist theology was a stepping stone on the way to developing womanist theology" (Ortega 1995:122). Again there might not be enough material to make it fit black women, but it proclaimed some mighty truth that black female theologians could not ignore:

1. When God is referred to and conceived in exclusively male terms, women are not thought to be in the image of God.
2. The Bible has been used in church and society to validate male domination of females.
3. The oppression of women is a cross-cultural reality extending to practically every Christian community in the world.
4. Christian women need images of the divine that also reflect the female.
5. Domestic violence and humans sexuality are subjects for theological reflection.

Feminist theologians and their works had a profound influence on the theological development of some of the African-American women who ultimately became prominent in the womanist theological movement. Even though their works lack adequate reference to black women's experience, they point out the sexist character of sources important for the development of the Western Christian tradition.

Womanist theology has itself contributed various ideas to the Christian theological enterprise in the areas of biblical hermeneutics, theological doctrine, ethics and a new understanding of the mission of the church.

3.7 Development of Womanist Theology

Womanist theology, a vision in its infancy is emerging among Afro-American Christian women (Williams: Journal, March 2, 1987:67). Five years prior to 1987, black female scholars have documented the biases towards black women that have existed in the women's liberation movements in America since their beginning in the nineteenth century. Angela Davis describes the first womens' rights convention held in America at Seneca falls in 1848. According to Williams (1987:44), the main theme of this convention was the white women's lack of concern for the slave women.

This takes us further to the womanist historian Milla Granson and her courageous work on a Mississippi plantation (King 1993:80). Her liberation history broadens our knowledge of the variety of strategies black women have used to obtain freedom. According to Sylvia Dannett in **Profiles in Negro Womanhood**; Milla Granson, a slave, conducted a midnight school for several years. Through this means she graduated hundreds of slaves, many of whom she taught to write a legible hand and forged their own passes and set out for Canada according to Williams (1993:80).

Women like Tubman and Granson used subtle and silent strategies to liberate themselves and large numbers of black people.

The following women's convention from the Seneca falls convention was held in Akron in 1851 and here Sojourner Truth delivered her famous "Ain't a Woman" speech. According to Williams (1987:44), some of the white women had been initially opposed to a Black woman having a voice in their convention Davis claimed, however, that by 1869 when the Equal Rights Association was ending its life, Sojourner Truth had begun to be recognised.

From their deliberations in their conferences one can realise that the origin and history of womanist theology has much to do with the unchristian ideologies of the feminist theology. It developed alongside its opponent (feminist theology), as a correctional service and combatting measure to liberate the community from white mentality of feminist theology.

There were, however white women's movements like the white women's rights movement and abolitionist movements, but they were not focussing on black women's liberation and racism but on ending the slavery. They were seeking the social equality for white women, according to Williams (1987:44). Even more devastating for black women in the nineteenth century were the racist strategies which individual white

feminists employed to gain white women's rights. According to Williams (1987:45) the most famous of these women was Elizabeth Cady Stanton. "We prefer Bridget and Dinah at the ballot box to Patrick and Sambo". The former represents the two white women and the later represent a black man and a black woman who had no rights to vote. It is no wonder that subsequent feminists made racist statements equal to those of Anthony and Stanton.

3.8 Emerging Black Women's Literature in the Church

Several works have recently appeared which lay the groundwork for the development of black women's perspective in theology, although at this early stage, they have appeared primarily in collections of essays in black and feminist theological works.

In *Black women and the Churches, Triple Jeopardy*, Theresa Hoover analysed the position of Black Women in predominantly white denominations, though she also mentions some of the problems in black denominations. She locates the source of black women's survival in a faith which has always strengthened them to struggle against the odds. Pauli Murray in *Black theology and feminist theology: A comparative view*, employs the inclusionary principle of white feminist theology to challenge proponents of Black theology to adopt a spirit of cooperation towards liberation and reconciliation and to take women's role more seriously. In black theology and the black woman she challenges black theology and the black Church to realise its own proclamation of liberation as the central message of the gospel by extending this principle to black women. In tasks of a prophetic church she defines the task of black feminist liberation theology to be that of exposing the various forms of oppression: racism, classism, sexism and imperialism. She contends that they are all interconnected and none of these forms of oppression can be eliminated by challenging them separately. At the request of a group of Black Seminarian women, James Cone published an essay entitled New Roles of Women in the Ministry: A theological Appraisal", which challenges the black Church

to divest itself of traditional oppressive attitudes towards women. Later Cone treats the theme of feminism in the black Church in two of his books in black theology. In *My Soul Looks Back*, he includes a discussion of black theology, feminism and Marxism and in *For My People*, he devotes a chapter to black theology, black Churches and black women. He traces black feminism in the 19th and 20th centuries and elaborates some of the forms of sexism in the black Church. Cone moves to challenge black male Ministers and theologians to advance black women's liberation in the church and society. James Evans has written an essay entitled "Black Theology and Black Feminism", like Cones, he challenges black theologians to address sexism.

Other articles helped to fill the historical vacuum of black women's contribution to black religion particularly in Pentecostal traditions. Pearl Williams-Jones in *Pentecostal women: A minority report*, identifies black women leaders of the 19th and 20th centuries who have held positions and power beyond the spheres usual for women. James S. Tinney in *The Feminist Impulse in Black Pentecostalism* has provided an historical theological overview of women in black Pentecostalism. Ceryl Gilkes *Together and in Harness : Women's Tradition in the Sanctified Church*, specifies the activities and strength of women in black holiness traditions and identifies how their contributions are irreplaceable, especially in the light of how patriarchy and racism impinge upon their participation.

A number of graduate theses have also appeared to contribute to the development of black women's theological perspective. Delores Williams "The black woman portrayed in selected black imaginative literature and some questions for Black theology", explores black women's image as mother through the antebellum slave narrative literature and postbellum literary material such as blues and spirituals. Williams suggests that given the peculiar reality of black women, perhaps the dominant Jewish and Christian biblical story of a woman which focuses on Sarah, wife of Abraham, is an inadequate model for black women. She proposes Hagar, the slave woman as the correlative of black women's

experience. She challenges Black theologians to re-examine the biblical sources of Christian for a black liberation. Theology that could be inclusive of the liberation of black women.

Acknowledging grounding in both black and feminist analyses, Lataunya Maria Bynum writes *Black Feminist Theology. A new word about God*, compares the theology of James Cone and Rosemary Ruether and conclude that "neither is sufficient to illumine the reality of black women. Black women must develop a perspective which is both black and feminist, and which affirms the revolutionary message of Jesus as freedom" (Grant 1989:208).

In her dissertation, "Resources for a constructive ethics for black women with special attention to the life and work of Zora Neal Hurston", Katie Canon explores the possibility of the literary tradition of black women as the most adequate source for a constructive black women ethic. Having engaged some dimensions of Hurston's work with black theologians Howard Thruman and Martin Luther King, J. Canon concludes that "even though black theologians generally reject the victimization of gender discrimination, these two theologians have identified three themes, love, justice and community which black women need in order to ensure their dignity as persons (Grant 1989:208). These themes, she concludes were operative in Hurston's work and in the literature of many black women writers.

Jualynne Dodson has contributed research tracing the history and development of the African Methodist Episcopal Church that gives central attention to the limited data about women's activities in the 19th century. Women's collective power in the African Methodist Episcopal Church focuses upon preaching women and missionary women. She offers a historical synopsis of their contribution to the church, particularly as these initiated structural changes in church life.

In a similar vein, Evelyn Brooks in the women's movements in the Baptist Church 1880-1920, traces the development of Black Baptist women's activities, exploring the intersection and interaction of race, class and gender consciousness of those women who created the women's convention Auxiliary of the National Baptist convention, and who thereby provided an arena for the leadership of Black Baptist women.

Though diverse and somewhat more descriptive than normative, these works lay the historical foundation that is needed for the development of a constructive black woman's theological perspective. This perspective in theology which she is calling womanist theology draws upon the life and experiences of some black women who have created meaningful interpretations of the Christian faith.

3.9 Summary

Womanist Theology by its origin and nature is a black American women struggle for the liberation from sexism, classism, and racism. This tridimensional character of womanism is the pillar of the whole direction of womanist theology. It is a movement which started as a reaction, respond and supplement to the short comings and weaknesses of feminist theology which did not give enough focus on the experiences of black women in the USA and which was not intended to emancipate black men and black women politically, socially, economically, educationally, and religiously. Feminism was not inclusive in its operations, for example it did not give attention to race issues. That is why Grant (1989:114) criticised white feminist theologians in the USA for not devoting time and energy to eradicating racism.

I would summarise by repeating the example given by Williams (1995:113) of feminist which is like a dress which can not fit a black woman although it is beautiful.

Womanist theology focuses mainly on issues of poverty, racism, survival and abuse. More biblical as it is, it exposes the invisibility of women in the Bible.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 A CRITIQUE OF FEMINIST THEOLOGY

The following feminist theologians will be studied in this chapter, namely Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Rosemary Radford Ruether.

4.1.1 Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza

She is an American New Testament biblical scholar. She is a Roman Catholic feminist theologian whose main focus and method of doing is historical-critical methodology and she attempts to reconstruct the history of the early church that includes a central role for women. She takes arguments with her own Roman Catholic Church, which excludes women from ecclesiastical leadership such as ordination into priesthood.

4.1.2 Rosemary Radford Ruether

Radford Ruether is also a Roman Catholic feminist theologian. She emphasises that the prophetic liberating tradition, a norm through which to criticise the Bible, does not choose a marginal idea in the Bible, but concentrates on a tradition that can be claimed as fair on the grounds of generally accepted biblical scholarship.

4.2 WHAT IS HERMENEUTICS FOR WOMEN?

Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1993:257) in her book *Searching the Scriptures* defines hermeneutics as follows: "It is the study that recognise the systematic oppression and marginalisation of women of all different classes, races, ethnic origins, sexual orientation, and physical abilities to be one of the most complex and pervasive injustices of human society". It is to read the Bible self-consciously as a woman. It is the way in which

females/women in the modern world are engaged in interpreting and assessing the meaning of biblical text from a self-consciously feminist perspective, using the Bible as instrument.

Hermeneutics is the process of conscious reflection on how women read and understand the Bible as an androcentric document. Following Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza we can describe feminist hermeneutics as the theoretical exploration of the exegetical and sociocultural presuppositions of biblical interpretation in the interest of women (Van der Kooi 1997:4).

A feminist biblical hermeneutics, Schüssler Fiorenza argues, "must take seriously the historical-patriarchal elements of the prophetic traditions in order to set free their liberating social-critical impulses for the struggle for women". It must retrieve them in and "through a feminist critical analysis rather than elevate them to an abstract interpretative principle or criterion" (West 1991:88).

In order to move towards such a feminist critical hermeneutics, Schüssler Fiorenza insists that women must move behind the text to a historical reconstruction of the context from which the text emerged. This is essential because the patriarchal texts do not mirror the historical and social context from which they came, but offer a selective and perspectival picture of the early Christian Communities. As Schüssler Fiorenza tries to demonstrate through historical reconstruction, women can move beyond the silences and backlashes against women found in the Bible to an awareness and appreciation of the participation and leadership of women in the life of the early Christian Communities. The biblical portrait of women in the early Christian Movements is the "tip of the iceberg" (West 1991:88). What is necessary is a systematic interpretation and historical reconstruction able to make the submerged bulk of the iceberg visible. In other words, "only a movement behind the text can enable women to retrieve their heritage, and see their

Christian fore-sisters, not merely as victims, but as victims and participants in the struggle for liberation.

In a similar spirit, Letty Russel (1985:12) argues that, "the Bible needs to be liberated from its captivity to one-sided white, middle-class, male interpretation. It needs liberation from privatised and spiritualised interpretations that avoid Gods concern for justice, human wholeness, and ecological responsibility, it needs liberation from abstract, doctrinal interpretations that remove biblical narrative from its concrete social and political context in order to change it into timeless truth".

In her monumental work, *In Memory of Her*, first published in 1983 Fiorenza used historico-critical biblical scholarship and feminist hermeneutical spectacles to challenge the accepted picture of the role of women in the time of the Bible and of early Christianity. She made a historical reconstruction of the position of women around Jesus and in early Christianity discovering a community where women were equal disciples. Because she goes beyond reforming tradition and revision, we regard her as being her "reconstructionist.

In her introduction to the tenth anniversary edition of *In Memory of Her*, she describes her methodology in some detail. Firstly, she maintains the need for a destabilisation of linguistic frames of meaning. For example, she shows how the language based on Greek and Latin have contributed to the concept of man/male/masculine as the norm for all humans, and women only being mentioned as exceptions to the rule. This means that linguistic-cultural methods need to be used to interrogate texts "not only as to what they say about women, but also how they construct what they say or do not say" (Fiorenza 1994:xx).

Secondly, historico-literary criticism is necessary to interrupt the positivist figuration of history. The contextual nature of the Bible must be understood; the experience of the

interpreters, and the context and experience of the readers today. History and historiography give a selective view of the past. They are perspectival discourses where facts and data are woven into an overall design to enhance or give meaning. She questions the possibility of determining positive truth with scientific objectivity, but affirms that only a reconstruction of a text can be offered. So in her work she offers "A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins".

Thirdly, she questions male scholars' reconstructions of the social world of early Christianity. She introduces the insights of socio-political feminist research in order to articulate an alternative model for "imaging" that period of history (Fiorenza 1994:xxviii). She notes tension between the Kyriarchical household codes, texts and the egalitarianism of Galatians 3:28. She compares this tension in the Church Community, with the tension in the Greek city between the theory and practice of democracy. The *polis* was democratic, but Plato and Aristotle argues that women, artisans and slaves were of inferior nature and had insufficient powers of reasoning to participate in democratic government. She notes that similar arguments have been used in the biblical and post-biblical period to sustain oppressive systems of racism, colonialism and classism, as well as sexism.

Finally, Fiorenza states that her work is an elaborative reconstruction of that tension, that struggle, that conflict, which has always existed between both the cultural-religious Kyriocentrism and the socio-political Kyriarchy and "the radical democratic vision of self-determination in all areas of socio-cultural and religious life" (Ruether 1994:xxx). By privileging women rather than marginalising them she wants to liberate, for women, the Bible history and theology. When she is accused of interpreting early Christianity through modern views of equality, she identifies the concepts of *ecclesia* and *basileia* to dispute that. The *ecclesia* was the gathering together of the body of interdependent members of every race, class and sex, with equal access to the gifts of the Spirit, and with different functions but equal honour. The *basileia* of Jesus was where the poor, the

despised, the underdogs, the sinners, both men and women were accepted; an alternative community; a counter culture. Democracy and liberation are not modern inventions. She maintains they were taught and demonstrated by Jesus, but they will always be the outcome of struggle and conflict.

Rosemary Radford Ruether in her major theological work *Sexism and God-talk* states that women's experience is for her the basic source of content and criterion of truth. In classical theology she claims that human experience is always the starting point and the ending point in the hermeneutical circle (Ruether 1993:12). She challenges the concept of "objective" source of truth in classical theologies, for she views the Bible and tradition as examples of codified collective human experience. She explains that: "Experience includes experience of the divine, experience of oneself, and experience of the community and the world, in an interacting dialectic. Received symbols, formulas, and laws are either authenticated or not through their ability to illuminate and interpret experience" (Ruether 1993:12). For her, experience is the basis of all theology. Feminist theology is unique only because it is based on women's experience. Classical theology is seen as based on male experience, and so cannot have objectified divine and universal authority.

Throughout history women have been denigrated and marginalised, so the redemptive message that women need to promote is their full humanity.

Ruether recognises that God's revelation is not finished but it is a gradual process in which God is alive and continues to reveal God self in women also. Women need to bring together their own experience as women and their study of the traditions of the past for, as she writes so expressively, "the hand of the divine does not write on a cultural tabula rasa" (Ruether 1993:14).

The Hebrew prophets used symbols from the religions of Canaan and the Near East. Christianity appropriated Jewish and Hellenistic Symbols to explain Jesus. Her method is to draw from many sources: firstly, from the Old and New Testament Scriptures; secondly, from marginalised and heretical writings of the Christian period; thirdly, from theologies of the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant traditions; fourthly, from the religions and philosophies of the Graeco-Roma world, and from the modern world views of Liberalism, Romanticism and Marxism (Ruether 1993:21-22).

In her book *Sexism and God-talk*, she studies the major Christian doctrines, using material from these diverse sources and applying a feminist perspective. She rejects dominant theological traditions that are "sexist", for sexism is itself a product of the fall: "women must reject a concept of the fall that makes them scapegoats for the advent of evil and uses this to punish them through historical subordination" (Ruether 1993:37). This does not mean, she continues, that women should reject the concept of the fall, but should rediscover its meaning in a radically new way.

Although patriarchy is seen by Ruether, as the context of the Bible, the Bible is not rejected but sources from it are used to criticise it. She appropriates the concept of "the prophetic-liberating tradition as a norm through which to criticise the Bible" (Ruether 1993:24). Women are oppressed and patriarchy is an example of an unjust system of socio-political power and a religious ideology to be denounced. God will intervene to establish a reign of justice and peace on earth. God's will is seen in the new society of Galatians 3:28. Prophetic-liberating tradition becomes, for Ruether, not a static set of ideas, but "a plumb-line of truth and untruth, justice and injustice that has to be constantly adapted to changing social contexts and circumstances" (Ruether 1993:27).

In the same way, then, that Ruether's hermeneutics attempts a feminist recovery of the biblical principles or patterns of the prophetic-liberating tradition, so too Schüssler Fiorenza's hermeneutics attempts a feminist recovery of the biblical heritage of women.

In other words, "both Ruether and Schüssler Fiorenza find something, a situation of struggle, which is potentially empowering for women in the struggle for liberation in the biblical tradition. The difference is that Ruether finds it primarily in the text while Fiorenza finds it primarily behind the text" (West 1991:90).

In other words, in the bulk of her discussion Ruether is dealing with prophetic-liberating traditions, patterns, contents, principles, ideas, imagery, symbols, paradigms, themes. All these terms form a semantic field which obviously has its focus on the text. However, when it comes to the New Testament Ruether is not as clear (West 1991:91). On the one hand she says that the counter cultural character of the Jesus movement has been reconstructed by the New Testament Scholar, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, on the other hand she talks of a suppressed tradition and fragments preserved under the surface of the New Testament.

Conclusion

The point I am making here is that while Schüssler Fiorenza's primary focus is behind the text, she still recognises empowering elements within the biblical text itself. Conversely, while Ruether's primary focus is on the text, she still recognises empowering elements behind the biblical text. This does not minimise the important difference of emphasis between them. With reference to the biblical text, Schüssler Fiorenza's position would tend more towards the instrumentalist position than Ruether's. As Cady recognises; "this is the most serious challenge facing theology and one which has been powerfully made by feminists" (Mosala 1989c:17).

4.3 STRATEGIES IN FEMINIST BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

Following Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, we can describe feminist hermeneutics as the theoretical exploration of the exegetical and socio-cultural presuppositions of biblical

interpretation in the interest of women. In the last twenty years books and articles on biblical women's studies have not only enlisted a wide readership in the churches, but they are also slowly making substantive entrance into the academy.

In the last years feminist biblical studies have developed several interpretive approaches and strategies for reading the Bible. All these strategies are pointing out to a seemingly contradictory phenomenon, in the words of Adrienne Rich: "her wounds came from the same source as her power". These strategies of interpretation demonstrate two facts: on the one hand they state that the Bible has its origin in the patriarchal cultures of antiquity and represents androcentric and patriarchal values. On the other hand, the same Bible has also inspired and authorized women and other nonpersons in their struggle for justice.

In the following paragraphs I give an outline of the main strategies of feminist interpretations, sustaining mainly on the work of Schüssler Fiorenza in *But she said* (1992:20ff).

4.3.1 Revisionist Interpretation

The aim of this strategy is to reshape biblical interpretation and imagination in order to reclaim the Bible as a support for Christian women's emancipation.

This approach has been the first one in feminist biblical interpretation. It shows that there is a paucity in theology on knowledge about the women of Scripture. Revisionist feminists see it as their task to rediscover the information about women that can still be found in the biblical texts and to remove the layers of centuries of androcentric interpretation that cover up the supposed original meaning of the text.

This revisionist approach presupposes that the biblical texts themselves are not misogynistic. The problem lies in the patriarchal interpretation. Therefore the Bible must be "depatriarchalised".

4.3.2 Concentration on Text and Translation

The main goal of this approach is to arrive at an historically and theologically adequate translation, namely a translation which makes those present who have been absent in historical and theological records. This second approach in feminist biblical interpretation is concerned with the androcentric character of biblical texts and discusses their proper translation. It attempts to make clear and expose the androcentric tendencies which are responsible for the marginalisation of women in the text. For example, it has been shown that texts about women's leadership actually were actively eliminated. I can refer to Colossians 4:15, where the author refers to Nympha, the woman who is the leader of a house church. In some later textual variants there is no doubt that the person in question is a man. That corresponds with the practice in later times, in which women were not accepted as leaders of local churches. This approach wants to unmask that issues of power are at work in elements of grammatical rules and cultural translation.

4.3.3 Imaginative Identification

The objective of this method is to break the marginalising tendencies of the androcentric text by retelling biblical stories differently. This approach is interested in personal identification and biblical imagination. Feminists who feel attracted by this approach seek to actualise biblical stories in role-play, storytelling, bibliodrama, dance and song. Stories in which women are silenced or marginalised are retold differently and reinterpreted. For example, they try to reconstruct the possible emotions and issues that motivated biblical women in their relations with each other. There is a danger and disadvantage in these imaginative biblical recreations, namely that it can lead to a

reproduction of the Western romanticist and individualist ideal of the "White Lady" and conservative motherhood (Van der Kooi 1997:6). In that case the identification agrees with a feminine role that is constructed by the androcentric text. This implies that the imaginative biblical reinterpretations have to go hand in glove with a hermeneutics of suspicion, as for example, is the case in the work of Renita Weems , who is, *inter alia*, working with imagination. There we find a critical interpretation which first questions the values and the roles that a text projects before re-imagining them in a feminist way.

4.3.4 Historical Interpretation

The main focus of this approach is to write women back into history and into biblical history. There are from long ago, the collections of source materials about women, either Jewish or Greek and Roman which give a lot of information, but these sources are pre-critical, in the sense that they trust androcentric texts about women as reliable and descriptive. A feminist historical interpretations has to use these texts with a hermeneutics of suspicion and has to put them in a feminist model of analysis. Furthermore, such an interpretation does not only focus on the history of women's oppression, but looks also at it as a history of resistance and struggle against patriarchal subordination. One way in which these feminists do this is by asking different historical questions, for example, what do we know about the experience of women is Israel, Syria, Greece, Egypt, Asia Minor or Rome? How did freeborn women, slave women, wealthy women, or business women live? Could women write and read? What rights did they have etc.

4.3.5 Socio-cultural Reconstruction

This is an attempt to write history from the perspective of the silenced. This strategy reconceptualises the task of early Christian historiography. This task requires the reconstruction of the story of power relations and struggles in the text. It does not isolate

the texts which speaks about women, but examines them in a socio-political and cultural-religious context. This means that the biblical texts about women are seen like the tip of an iceberg, merely hinting at what is hidden by historical silence. It means that these texts have to be read as touchstones of the historical reality that they both repress and construct. It will make readers of the Bible conscious that biblical histories are not reports of events or transcripts of facts but rhetorical constructions that have shaped the information available to them in the light of their religious or political interests. An example of these reconstructive early Christian models is the model of Jesus' apostolic succession, which tells that Jesus called only male apostles and ordained them to priesthood, who in turn ordained their male successors and so on. One has still to keep in mind that the androcentric text is produced by a historical reality in which the so-called "absent others" are present and active.

4.3.6 Ideological Inscription

This approach tries to problematise the rhetorical function of androcentric texts and their dualistic oppositions in order to resist the identity information the text gives.

This model concentrates on the ideological inscriptions of androcentric texts and works from the conviction that androcentric texts are not a mirror of the historical reality of women. This relationship between the androcentric text and historical reality has to be decoded as a complex ideological construction. "You have to listen to the contradictions, the silences, the arguments and so on in the text in order to unmask the kyriocentric or master-centred grain of the text" (Van der Kooi 1997:7).

4.3.7 Women as Subjects of Interpretation

The line of thought here has to do with resisting being robbed of human values by a kyriocentric language system.

This approach gives attention on the woman as a reading subject, the woman as the "resisting reader". A point to be made here is that patriarchal biblical language is not only androcentric, it is also kyrio-centric. This means that it does not only lead to the "emasculation" of the woman, but also to her colonisation. Women readers have to resist the master-identification of the androcentric, racist, classist, and colonialist text, or face even more self-alienation.

4.3.8 Socio-Political Location

This approach advocates reading in relation to commitment to a liberation struggle. This last strategy of feminist biblical interpretation articulates the socio-political, the cultural and pluralistic religious locations and contexts of biblical readings. Using this strategy, the social location of double or triple marginalisation can be analysed. When womanist scholars name racial slavery as the socio-political context of biblical interpretation, they ask about the kinds of values and symbolic constructs which have enabled the dominant white Christian Church and academy to justify, both biblically and theologically, cattle slavery. They clarify in which sense hermeneutical framework of biblical interpretation are determined by economic, cultural and racial interests.

4.3.9 Conclusion

One may conclude that all these different strategies have this in common: they criticise the following assumptions of modern understanding of religion of the Bible.

A. PRIVATISATION

The biblical message addresses the individual. It has no validity for the ordering of social and political life.

B. HISTORICAL LIMITATION

The biblical message can only claim relevance for the situation of the origin. It belongs to a totally different world and thus cannot claim significance in modern times.

C. INTERIORISATION

The biblical message pertains to the life of the soul, redemption from personal sin, and eternal life. "The Kingdom of God is not of this world" is white ideology.

D. INDIVIDUALIST ETHICS

The biblical message proclaims universal moral values and attitudes which appeal to the conscience of the individual. Therefore it is the task of religion and not that of science to ascertain the moral sense of Scripture.

4.4 PRINCIPLES FOR A FEMINIST HERMENEUTICS

4.4.1 Introduction

Feminist consciousness includes many elements, not all of which are agreed upon by every feminist. There is pluralism within feminism as in any other rich and comprehensive interpretation of humanity and the world, yet some central convictions are shared by large groups of feminists. Most fundamental, perhaps, is the conviction that women are fully human and are to be valued as such (Farley 1983:44). The content of this conviction, however is different from some similar affirmations that are non-feminist. Thus, for example, it is not to be mistaken for the view that women are human, though derivatively and partially so. Hence, a feminist belief about the humanness of women is specified by the inclusion of principles of mutuality. Further, feminist consciousness

recognises the importance of women's own experiences as a way to understanding. "It takes seriously the essential embodiment of human persons, it opens to an ecological view of the value of all of nature and the context of the whole of the universe, it affirms a mode of collaboration as the primary mode for human interaction" (Farley 1983:44).

The conviction that women are fully human and are to be valued as such is the underlying principle for a feminist hermeneutics. In order not to risk trivialising the central insight of feminism, however, it must be understood to include within it at least two closely related principles: (1) the principle of equality (women and men are equally fully human and are to be treated as such) and (2) the principle of mutuality (based on a view of human persons as embodied subjects, essentially relational as well as autonomous and free). In at least one major version of feminism, these are claims founded on a new understanding of the reality of women. So profound is their persuasive appeal that they give rise to an experience of a moral imperative. They function, then, as interpretive principles but also as normative ethical principles in a feminist theory of justice. They function, moreover, as the groundwork for a strategy of commitment to the well-being of women, to counter whatever biases perpetuated gender in equalities and structural barriers to human mutuality.

Feminism represents a fundamental need for a deeper analysis of the contexts of human life, concepts of the human self and categories of human relation by investigating and articulating on questions of equality and mutuality. It makes clear the urgency for taking account of the experience of all groups of human persons. From the interpretive vantage point of the experience of women, of their oppression and their achievements, their needs and their contributions, their freedom and their responsibilities, feminism raises ground-breaking questions on human dignity and models of human relationships. It also assumes transformative experiences of new and growing insight on the part of individuals: deeply formed convictions about the capabilities and possibilities of each human being.

4.4.2 Equality

Contemporary feminist consciousness, developed through a careful listening to women's own experience largely prompted by new modes of sharing this experience, incorporates certain conclusions. First, all efforts to justify the inferiority of women to men falsify women's experience. Traditional warrants for gender inequality have been demystified and rejected. Women have recognised the contradiction between received interpretations of their identity and function on the one hand, and their own experience of themselves and their lives on the other.

Women have also unmasked deceptive theories that assert a principle of equality but still assume basic inequalities among persons determined by gender, or race, or any property of individuals and groups and essential to their humanity. Thus, the long-standing formal principle of equal treatment for equals has been recognised by women in its radical powerlessness by itself to discern who are the "equals". Further, where "equal protection under the law" was said to apply to all persons, women learned only too well that this did not necessarily include them, just as it did not apply to slaves. Strong theories of "complementarity" have been exposed that cover for patterns of equality for relationships in which the role of one partner is always inferior to, dependent upon and instrumental to the role of the other.

Feminist consciousness opens, then, to acknowledge for women those essential features of personhood that modern liberal philosophy has identified for human persons; individual autonomy and a capacity for free choice. Once these features are appropriated for women as well as men, the conclusion follows that women too must be respected as "ends", not as mere "means", and their interests and aims must be respected no less than men's.

4.4.3 Equitable Sharing

Women have learned more than lessons on liberal philosophy from their experiences of disadvantage, and their perceptions of the disadvantaged histories of others who are similarly fully human. These experiences have impelled a feminist universalisation of the principle of equality that includes a claim by all to an equitable share in the goods and services necessary to human life and basic happiness. The accumulated experience of life situation in which inequality is not limited to political powerlessness or personal lack of esteem, but is a matter of hunger and homelessness, sickness and injury. It has pushed feminist consciousness to a positive form of the principle of equality, one based not only on the self protective right of each to freedom but on the positive self-yielding as well as self-enhancing participation of all in human solidarity.

4.4.4 Mutuality

Finally, then, women have found in their experience clear indications of the inadequacy of a view of human persons that respects them by isolating them one from another. When autonomy is the sole basis of human dignity and the single principle for social arrangements, individuals are atomised. Their primary mode of relating becomes one of opposition and competition between the self and the other. "Women claim that gross forms of individualism not only undermine the common good but fail to take account of another essential feature of personhood; the feature of relationality, that feature which ultimately requires mutuality as the primary goal of relationships between persons" (Farley 1983:47).

Only with a principle of mutuality can human persons truly be affirmed as embodied subjects, as beings whose value lies not only in their freedom but also in their capacity to know and be known, to love and be loved, as beings whose destiny is communion.

Deep in women's experience lies the long-standing awareness of the reality that theorists of sociality have come to see. Feminist consciousness stands as a corrective to a liberal philosophy that fails to understand human solidarity and the importance and need for mutuality. It also stands as a corrective to theories of sociality that fail to incorporate a requirement for basic human equality, that fail to affirm the feature of autonomy along with the feature of relationality. Feminists thus reject romantic returns to organic models of society where woman's relation is determined, each in her own place, without regard for free agency or for personal identity and worth that transcends roles. Yet feminists are convinced that persons, women and men, are centres of life, capable (without contradiction) of being centered more and more in themselves as they are centered more and more beyond themselves in one another.

They are convinced, too, that in this misery of autonomy and relationality, equality and mutuality, lie the clues they need for the relations of persons to the whole universe in which they live.

4.5 BIBLICAL AUTHORITY IN FEMINISM

The starting point of biblical authority in feminism is the notion that the Bible is the authoritative word of God. According to Tolbert, there are differences of opinion between the Roman Catholic and Protestant feminists concerning the authority of the Bible (Tolbert 1990:6). In the Roman Catholic feminism there is a tendency to put the Bible at the level of God.

Defenders of biblical authority typically see it as ordained by God, deriving from the nature of the Scriptures as God's own word: an inviolable and unchanging source of divine truth, and the only sure ground of Christian faith. Feminists, observing the patriarchal pronouncements and assumptions of the text (as well as its interpreters) and alert to its harmful consequences for women, commonly view those claims of divine

authority as demonic, giving supernatural sanction to oppressive social forms and presenting a false understanding of human nature. "In the eyes of many feminists, the Bible is an enemy of women, which must be denied authority" (Bird 1994:2).

The Protestants accept the Bible as authoritative and also place the experience especially of women as source and part of faith (Sakenfeld 1988:6-7), (see Masenya 1999:3). The weak point in the argument of the Protestants is its lack of praxis and this problem needs to be solved.

Of all the forms of modern disaffection with the Scriptures, feminist criticism is the most profound. It goes to the root. It permits no easy salvage. Its origins lie in the emergence of a new world and a new world view which we know as the Enlightment (Bird 1994:3). It is largely a Western and Protestant phenomenon, linked to the special place given to the Bible by the Reformers, who made Scripture the final norm of faith and practice, signalled by the watchword of *Sola Scriptura*, "by Scripture alone". In the Reformers' attack on the abuses of the Church in the Sixteenth Century, however, the Bible's authority came to be affirmed over the authority of the Church, and it is in that context, according to Bird, that the *Sola Scriptura* dictum was formulated (Bird 1994:4).

With the enlightened, however, a new form of attack appeared, which ultimately impacted on Catholic as well as Protestant understandings of Scripture, but had a far deeper and more devastating effect on Protestant belief and Church life. It also had a much broader impact on the general culture of predominantly Protestant countries, because the Reformers had not only elevated the authority of Scripture as a source of doctrine, but they had also made it the centre of their worship and the foundation of their civil law. They had also given it into the hands of the people, so that for the first time in the history of the Church the Bible became the people's book, not just the church's book. For the first time it was mass produced and translated into the vernacular. God's word was available now for direct consultation by ordinary believers. Thus, when modern

views of the Bible's origins and content began to emerge, which placed it alongside other ancient historical documents and exposed its contradictions, discrepancies, factual errors and moral lapses, the effect was deeply and broadly disturbing. Problems in the text that had long been recognised, but had been explained by various forms of typological, allegorical, or other spiritual readings, now appeared to be the result of human error or fallibility.

The Reformers' emphasis on the "plain" or literal meaning of the text exposed its failings. This idea became the starting point of feminist doubt of the authority of the Bible. How could such a document still be understood as the word of God (Bird 1994:4).

The response to that dilemma took several forms, and we are still living with the consequences of those choices. Some, finding the claims of human and divine origin incompatible, chose to deny the notion of divine revelation. Since this position was readily embraced by individuals and groups, like the French Deists, who were intent on curbing the church's power or rejecting its teachings on a variety of matters, the new critical approach to the Bible was seen by many as anti-religious. The great majority, for whom faith had first priority, struggled in various ways to silence or repress the new criticism and its alarming results. Theologians attempted to defend traditional understandings of the Bible by elaborating theories of inspiration and by insisting, against claims of fallibility and error, that divine inspiration rendered the Scriptures infallible and inerrant in all their statements. Some extended the notion of inspiration to the words themselves as preserved in the original Greek and Hebrew, even including the Hebrew vowel points. Most discussion of biblical authority remains locked in the terms of debate born in the post Enlightenment period and fixed in the nineteenth century disputes.

Americans in the twentieth century came to accept, as a result of Enlightment, "a more limited view of the Bible's authority and embrace an understanding of the Scripture that

saw divine revelation working through human agency and conditioned by the circumstances under which it was given" (Bird 1994:20).

Indeed, along with many of the so-called "classics" of Western literature, the Bible continues to exercise over women, and other oppressed groups like homosexuals, a form of textual harassment, appropriating social discrimination into textual structures and categories. To excuse the Bible, or other "great" literature, for these acts of textual violence on the grounds that they are simply reflecting the social ethos of earlier cultures is either to underestimate the continuing power of these alienating images or to approve tacitly the existence of oppression in times past just because they are past. "Jewish and Christian feminist, and especially Protestant feminists whose religious formation has been so permeated by Scripture, are thus faced with a difficult dilemma: honesty and survival as whole human beings requires that we point out and denounce the pervasive patriarchal hierarchies of oppression, both social and sexual, that populate the Bible, and yet at the same time we must also acknowledge the degree to which we have been shaped and continue to be nourished by these same writings. How are we, then, to understand the same Bible as enslaver and liberator?" (Tolbert 1990:12). According to Tolbert the Bible is seen both as redeemer and oppressor.

For Masenya and others, the central issue around which feminist approaches to biblical authority revolves, is the place of women's experience in appropriating for themselves the biblical witness. "Nearly all feminists would agree that experience cannot be ignored, because it inevitably affects every person's interpretation of Scripture" (Masenya 1999:3).

Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza can be seen as the advocate of women's experience in matters of biblical authority. For her, experience cannot be separated from the Bible. What is important for Fiorenza is the starting point in hermeneutics. She overemphasises the pivotal role of experience in understanding what is authoritative in the Bible.

Feminist theology according to Fiorenza "should start with women's experience in their struggle for liberation, not with the Bible: (Fiorenza 1983:17). She argues that "the locus of divine revelation and grace is not the Bible, or the tradition of the patriarchal church, but it is the *ekklesia* of women and the lives of women who live the option for our women selves" (Masenya 1999:4). She further maintains: "It is not simply the experience of women but the experience of women and all those oppressed struggling for liberation from patriarchal oppression" (Fiorenza 1985:128).

For Fiorenza what is significant for women's struggles towards their liberation is, women's experience, not the Bible. It becomes, for her, a patriarchally-oriented document. "Some have accused her of having denounced the Bible and created a women's Bible by means of a feminist critical reconstruction" (Pinnock 1986:54).

Alongside Fiorenza there is a view of another famous Feminist Biblical Scholar, namely Letty Russel. Though Russel acknowledges the authority of the Bible, she qualifies this acknowledgement. She argues: "The Bible has authority in my life because it makes sense of my experiences and speaks to me about the meaning and purpose of my humanity in Jesus. Its authority in my life stems from its story of God's invitation to participation in the restoration of wholeness, peace, and justice in the world" (Russel 1985:138).

For this feminist theologian, biblical authority is not accepted at all costs. It is accepted only if it lines up with her experience, particularly her experience of the wholeness which God offers her through Jesus Christ.

Rosemary Ruether summarises her view on biblical authority negatively as follows: "The Bible has shaped revelatory experiences which were interpreted by men from a patriarchal perspective. The ongoing interpretation of these revelatory experiences and their canonisation further this patriarchal bias by eliminating traces of female experience

or interpretating them in an androcentric way. The Bible, in turn becomes the authoritative source for the justification of patriarchy in Jewish and Christian society" (Bird 1994:69).

Bird has a problem and a question to pose in as far as the biblical authority is concerned. Her question is: "How can such a work claim divine sanction, and how can women find an authoritative word in a book that systematically distorts the truth of women's nature and experience, making it conform to men's or setting it apart as "other", alien, unclean? How can feminists use the Bible, if at all?" (Bird 1994:69). Sakenfeld's conclusion is worth citing here, since it identifies the question of authority as the critical underlying issue: "Thus no feminist use of biblical material is finally immune to the risk of finding the Bible hurtful, unhelpful, not revealing of God, and not worth the effort to come to grips with it. Regardless of approach, feminists may find that the Bible seems to drive them away from itself (and sometimes from God), rather than drawing them closer" (Sakenfeld 1985:55).

The last question which shapes the approach of Bird in Biblical authority is, "Why then do women seek to hold on to a book that has historically enslaved them?" The attempt to answer these questions gives us a glue of Bird's view of the matter. According to Bird, the Bible, especially in Protestantism, is essential to articulation of Christian faith and thus essential to Christian identity. That is why the modern loss of familiarity with the Bible content is so serious for the Church, it represents a dangerous amnesia that threatens loss of identity.

There is another reason for feminists to maintain the painful tie to a patriarchal text beyond the threat of lost community and the threat to identity, and that is that this source of bondage is at the same time a source of liberation, and in Bird's view, the primary source of feminist critique of patriarchal oppression. She feels that she is a feminist because she is a Christian in the first place. For the critique of oppressive systems and

ideological, political and economical and of idols, and the demand for justice are fundamental to the biblical message (Bird 1994:71). Women must see the Bible as a weapon against patriachalism in the Bible. She is putting the Bible as a primary source of faith and she may get opposition with those feminists, like Tolbert, who place women's experience first although they both agree on the issue of the two pointed nature of the Bible, The Bible is seen as a problem and a solution or to put it in the feminist way, the Bible is the oppressor and the liberator. This is the dilemma in which the Bible puts women.

Different generations, groups and individuals will hear that message in different texts and in different terms, and they will translate it in terms appropriate to their own contexts and experience as a word of release from bondage for African-American slaves in the nineteenth century. America, as a critique of oppressive political systems in Latin America, as a rejection of racist social policies in South Africa and the twentieth century America, and a judgment on women's oppression in patriarchal societies around the globe.

Different feminists assess the tension between patriarchal word and liberating message in different ways and use different means to locate and retrieve a feminist message. Bird (1994) believes that feminism has an indispensable contribution to make. What is widely perceived as a threat to faith (for example those who regard the idea of feminism to attack the authority of the Bible as blasphemous to believers who reverence the book by which they have lived, those who choose to trust its words as they have received them and submit to its authority as interpreted by the Church), is, she believes "God's gift in our time - to the Church and to the world - to save us from the false idols to which we cling and to lead us forward to the wholeness envisioned in creation, or revisioned as new creation" (Bird 1994:73).

Feminists insists that the Bible is the words of men, and further, of men who have misconstrued the nature of their sexually bifurcated humanity, crating systems of oppression for women, which operate on both the political and ideological level.

That is no reason to deny authority to this book, authority even as the word of God, for we have heard God's speaking here, God's words in human speech and thought. In fact we do not hear that word in any other way. The heart of the Gospel message by which we live, and to which this book testifies, is that God has chosen to dwell among us, as one of us, and that we know God because we have seem God in our own likeness. Bird here is advocating the idea that we cannot reject the Bible simply on the basis that it is written by men or human beings, because God dwells in human beings and God is one of the human beings. The Word of God in human words: that is the mystery and power of our affirmation about the Bible, and that is the source of its authority for us.

Conclusion

I wish to summarise and conclude by citing the options pursued by various feminist biblical scholars, drawing on Sakenfeld's (1988) survey. Sakenfeld presents a typology of feminist positions on biblical authority, focussing on the role of women's experience and definition of experience in appropriating the biblical witness. "Nearly all would agree, she says, that experience cannot be ignored in interpreting Scripture" (Bird 1994:75). From that point of agreement three lines of thought diverge. At one extreme is Fiorenza, who makes experience, and more particularly "the personally and politically reflected experience of oppression and liberation" the criterion for appropriateness, for biblical interpretation and the evaluation of biblical authority claims.

At the other extreme Sakenfeld places the literature of the Evangelical wing of American Protestantism, illustrated by essays from the Evangelical Colloquium on women and the Bible held in 1984. While she notes diversity of opinion within that collection and

cautions against generalising, she finds that most of the authors seek a canonical check on "destructive subjectivism", while struggling with the question of "how Scripture itself can adjudicate debates between competing interpreters", for example Letha Scanzoni and Nanci Hardesty. These scholars define themselves as evangelical in the sense that they have a commitment to the authority of Scripture and a belief in the significance of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. Such a stance is similar to that of many Pentecostal Bible interpreters in South Africa. Scanzoni and Hardesty suggest that the first source of theology should be Scripture (Bird 1994:76). However, for the interpretation of Scripture, three other parts of the Methodist hermeneutics added to Scripture are tradition, experience and reason which also always come into play in this matter. For them, experience is understood as a personal communion with Jesus Christ who is proclaimed in the Bible. They regard Scripture as a primary source over experience, thus subordinating it to Scripture, a view different from that of Fiorenza.

However, these two feminist scholars, like Fiorenza, acknowledge that there are people, other than women who share their experiences. In their case, it is not a political experience, but a spiritual experience, that of a close relationship with Jesus Christ (Masenya 1999:5). They define experience as "own personal religious experiences and those of people we know. Like other feminist biblical scholars, Scanzoni and Hardesty emphasise the inevitability of the subjectivity of the interpreter (Sakenfeld 1998:8).

4.6 MODELS OF BIBLICAL AUTHORITY IN FEMINIST HERMENEUTICS

When women today in the Christian Community become aware of their situation within a patriarchal religious institution and moreover, when they recognise that the Bible is a major implement for maintaining the oppression of patriarchal structure, then they are faced with the problem of binding the ways in which they respond and adjust to that situation. What models do they use to approach the problem of biblical authority in their

faced with the problem of binding the ways in which they respond and adjust to that situation. What models do they use to approach the problem of biblical authority in their hermeneutics? Elizabeth Fiorenza depicts out the three models of Biblical Authority in *Feminist Hermeneutics*.

4.6.1 The Dialogical Authority Model

The first model begins with the experience, still formative for many women, of the fundamentally non-intellectual commitment to Scripture as somehow determinative for the personal and communal identity of Christians.

This model envisions an educational effort to clarify the nature of authority in this commitment, and especially to distinguish authority from coercion on the one hand, and from influence on the other. To experience Scripture as coercive is to experience it as threatening one with its inherent ability to carry out its warnings and promises. Fundamentalists who construe Scripture as the literal word of God may experience it as having such coercive power. The experience of Scriptural influence, on the other hand, is of its persuasive potential, the sense that it provides information about our environment and may help in the decision-making process. It has no more inherent value in such a process than any other worthwhile source of information or guidance. Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite correlates these perspectives with the conservative and liberal views on authority in general. According to Susan Brooks, "the conservative view is that authority is always exercised through coercion and therefore that an authoritarian order must be hierarchical. The liberal view has been that authority is vested in an order of persuasion by reason and therefore must be egalitarian" Fiorenza 1994:162).

In distinction from coercion and influence, authority is defined here as a free surrendering to the jurisdiction of Scripture. Fiorenza is of the opinion that what it means to live within the jurisdiction of Scripture will vary from person to person. What is constant is

that an uncoerced acknowledgment of this authority has been made. Once authority is granted, one attempts to live in alignment with its source without need of threat, promise, or argumentation. Thus obedience to true authority involves no loss of freedom.

What induces such granting of authority and, most importantly, what keeps such an orientation from becoming mindless obedience? Political theorist David VJ Bell suggests that the answer lies in a shared set of values or beliefs held by both the one who gives and the one who takes authority (Fiorenza 1994:163). Thus one might ask, what authentic authority might women looking toward the beginning of the twenty-first century hold in common with an ancient and androcentric text? I present this reflection: within Scripture itself, the authority of text is always understood in relation to the authority of persons. Whether in Moses or Huldah, in David or Esther, in Solomon or woman wisdom of Proverbs, the authority of the text is always an embodied authority: persons must authorise the text, even as it authorises them. Thus, true authority has an dialogical quality. Paradoxically, in order to grant authority to someone or something else, one must first have the authority to do so. Legitimate and uncoerced granting occurs from a position of strength, not from weakness. This granting is, moreover, reciprocal. For a text to have this dialogical authority, it must continually create new persons to participate in this ongoing interaction. In other words, a truly authoritative text will have a generative, life-giving quality.

Many Christian women, including feminist women, whose lives and vocations have been shaped by Scripture, have been created by the text in this way. The life-giving quality of Scripture provides a powerful, experiential point of departure to encourage others to participate in this dialogical exchange of authority. The act of interpretation becomes the bringing together of the biblical traditions with present circumstances to create life for the present and future, a process that Schüssler Fiorenza envisions in her discussion of the hermeneutics of remembrance and of creative actualisation.

Precisely this celebrative identification with Scripture may prepare the ground for the more painful aspect of remembrance and also for what Schüssler Fiorenza calls the hermeneutics of suspicion and of proclamation, the recognition that the Bible's patriarchal, androcentric character must be named and condemned. Sometimes the authority of Scripture that is embodied in persons will call for the destruction of the existing, coercive institutions that have usurped authority. In fact, the first example of such a call occurs the very first time anyone is reported to have interpreted Scripture, and that interpreter was a woman. In II Kings 22, the prophet Huldah proclaims the message of the newly found book of the covenant to be the destruction of Judah. Working process of dialogical authority entails that the woman whom Scripture authorises will sometimes have occasion to de-authorise Scripture itself. Thus, the authority of women over Scripture becomes a primary credendum of Scriptural authority.

This model of Biblical authority suggests one way of transcending the polarity of the critical versus the inclusive in feminist theological hermeneutics. It presupposes both that persons are created by their traditions and that individuals may take up liberated subject positions in a generally oppressive discourse, presuppositions that are supported by a post-structuralist feminist theory that resists idealisation of a unified conception of women's or even feminist experience. This model potentially withholds, or at least delays, a thorough going critique of the tradition, but it does so in the interests of remaining in conversation with women who may yet be empowered to make a fuller acknowledgment of their own biblically grounded authority with respect to the Bible, the Church and society.

4.6.2 The Metaphor Model

In three books, theologian Sallie McFaque has elaborated the structure of metaphorical theology. The purpose of this theological model is to carve a third way between religious language that is idolatrous, regarded by its users as having the capacity to refer literally

to God, a language that is irrelevant, so sceptical of making valid claims about God that it seems meaningless. Against these alternatives, metaphor perceives similarity in dissimilarity, sees "this as that", without confusing "this for that". A metaphorical theology, then, will be one that sees connections between God and the world, but sees them as "tensive, discontinuous and surprising", one that insists on the dialectic of the positive and the negative, on the "is" and the "is not" (Fiorenza 1994:164).

Although McFaque's project as a whole involves a constructive theological task, a significant part of her argument has to do with the authority and use of Scripture. "There is no language more likely either to become idolatrous or seem irrelevant than that of the Bible" (Fiorenza :164). McFaque's proposal to transcend these two undesirable possibilities is to view the Bible as a poetic classic and a classic model for Christianity.

The word classic in each phrase points to the Bible's proven ability, across many times and places, to make itself relevant as a discloser of reality. Its classic quality points to its intrinsic authority. The word classic also, however, indicates the Bible's conservative character. It requires qualification by the terms "poetic" and "model", which suggest its reforming and revolutionary power. According to McFaque, "as model, the distance between the Bible and the reality it is attempting to express is always maintained. A model or metaphor is never identifiable with its object, the Bible as model can never be the word of God" (Fiorenza 1994:164). By the same token, as a poetic text, the Bible's greatness is defined by its ability to say many things, its intrinsic demand to be interpreted always anew. The multivocal rhetoric of poetry and the is/is not conceptuality of the model are aligned in metaphorical thinking. Precisely because of the Bible's metaphorical characteristic, tension, dialectic, openness, change, growth and relativity must be intrinsic to a proper understanding of its authority. Further, the Bible calls inherently for a questioning of its linguistic distortions and false consciousness.

McFaque's conception of the Bible as a classic model/poetic classic provides, in one sense, an elaboration on Schüssler Fiorenza's concept of the Bible as historical prototype or root-model. Her focus on language, however, as well as her orientation to a larger constructive theology, also provides a different, though complementary, set of possibilities for actualising a feminist hermeneutics. Work by McFaque and others has contributed numerous examples of metaphors whose affective depth and structural power often derive from their classic source in Scriptural traditions, but whose authority is grounded in their capacity to generate new and liberating structures in the contemporary world. McFaque regards "the Kingdom of God" as the root metaphor of Christianity. As a root metaphor, it is both supported and fed by many extended metaphors, the various parables, which leave its meaning ambiguous, multi-levelled and imagistic. It also generates translation languages into more conceptual discourse, which lend it precision and consistency. McFaque's metaphor, is characteristic of her work and is evident also in her discussion of the life and death of Jesus as a "parable of God". She says that:

> In order to understand the ways of God with us, something unfamiliar and unknown to us, about which we do not know how to think or talk, we look at that life as a metaphor of God. What we see through that grid or screen is not on one level an ordinary, secular story of a human being, but also a story shot through with surprise, unconventionality and incongruities which not only upset our conventional expectations for instance, of what a Saviour is and who gets saved, but also involve a judgment on our part, surely this man is the Christ (Fiorenza 1994:165).

This metaphorical perspective on classic theological loci-kingdom and Christ in the biblical tradition is complemented in McFaque's work by attention to other, more peripheral images by means of which she seeks to open and augment theological discourse; for example, the universe as God's body, and God as lover, mother, and friend. The present author has followed McFaque's lead in analysing a Hebrew Bible metaphor, wisdom as woman in the book of Proverbs, as a theological root metaphor. In the context

of feminist theology, the metaphor of woman wisdom affirms the priority of human experience, especially women's experience, in the development of theology as well as articulating a human relationship with God as Goddess. Woman wisdom, furthermore, both reinforces and undercuts the concept of an authoritative Scripture, defining this authority as personal, relational, and laminal. One final example of the fruitfulness of metaphorical theology can be found in Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite's metaphor for the contemporary church. Susan proposes that what we see the church as, how we metaphorise it, is crucial to the kind of church it will be. She commends the metaphors "Body of Christ" and "the poor" as appropriate metaphors for the North American context.

The concept of metaphor, then, can provide both a theoretical perspective on the nature of Scriptural authority itself and also a methodological tool for allowing liberating seeds of the tradition, heretofore scattered and fallow, to blossom forth with possibilities for new structures of reality. In this process, the metaphor model serves two other purposes for a feminist hermeneutics. Firstly, by emphasising the poetic, it taps into the power of imagination, a crucial source of energy and vision for creating a new future. Secondly, by emphasising interpretation, it allows us to experience both our distance from the past, as we seek to understand a given metaphor's function in ancient times, and our connection with that past, as we meditate on the metaphor's meaning and power today. The written canon will be one, though not the only, source for such seeds. The authority of the metaphor will derive, moreover, not only from its source but also from its capacity to empower the transformation of individuals and society toward wholeness and inclusivity.

4.6.3 The Trickster Model

A third model for a feminist theological hermeneutics is more radical than the first two, yet still remains in touch with the experience of empowerment through conversation with

the text. According to Schüssler Fiorenza, this hermeneutic stance is that of reading as a trickster or to use an image at home in the Bible itself, reading as a strange woman.

In the folklore of many traditional cultures, the trickster is a laminal figure, that is, one who stands at the margins of authority, who embodies ambiguity and chaos, and who reminds the established orders that such forces of indeterminacy are inescapably present in their midst. The last point is crucial, different cultural word views may attempt to explain disorder in any number of ways, but they can not ultimately deny its presence. The trickster figure, by embodying chaos in the guide of humour, allows for its acknowledgment and its embrace within the bounds of order. This embrace of chaos, in turn, imbues a potentially static, deadly order with lifelines and flexibility.

Distinctive yet similar, the biblical image of the strange woman may provide a hermeneutical key for the difficult attraction of Christian women and androcentric text. In the book of Proverbs, the strange woman is a highly condensed symbol of evil, an evil defined by the chaos of all the lies outside the acceptable system, the foreigner, the adulterer, the prostitute, the ritually impure. Remarkably, the Proverbs text also develops an equally powerful symbol of all that is good, wisdom personified as a woman. Though they are evaluated as moral opposites, similarly in vocabulary and imagery links these two figures to a considerable degree, both appear in the public sphere of streets and market, both invite listeners to their houses, both are to be gasped and embraced. This bonding of female identified good and evil create a dynamic not unlike that of folklore's trickster, the experience of ambiguity and potential chaos invading orderly oppositions. The trickster like ambiguity of the strange woman may also be seen in other biblical narratives about foreign women. Tamar (Genesis 38) Ruth, and Delilah, for example, are all figures who render the distinction between good and evil ambiguous by posing the possibility that good - indeed, the will of God can come from (woman) evil.

To read, then, as a trickster or a strange woman involves, first, claiming identity with those at the margins and, second, willingness to read against the text, to read subversively. Tricksters and strange women recognise that although the editor of Proverbs united the figures of woman wisdom and woman stranger by means of female imagery, his intention was to compel his male readers to tell the difference, to embrace wisdom and avoid the stranger. A hermeneutics of strangeness teaches us to tell the sameness, to undercut the apparently absolute opposition between good and evil, to illuminate; instead of their paradoxical, but experientially validated unity, to affirm the disorder that energises their struggle against unjust order.

It oppresses women to classify them as ideal wife or evil temptress. Although the Bible is, on one level, androcentric throughout, blatantly sexist passages such as these in Proverbs confront modern readers with unavoidable choices that may be masked elsewhere. It would seem at first glance that the choice is an either or. Either we choose to accept the text's sexist ideology or, from out of our modern historical consciousness, we argue that such ideas are the product of prior age, not relevant to us, worthy only of being ignored. But if women will listen to only those parts of the Bible they agree with, where then is its challenge to faith, its ability to make them see the log in their own eye, as they rub at the speck they find in Israel? To read subversively, to read as a strange woman, is to take seriously this saying from Proverbs 18:21. "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love her shall eat of her fruits".

We are bound, in our humanity, to be lovers of language. The Proverb reminds us of the inescapable duality that results, the encounter with both death and life. Every word contains its opposite. Meaning is not just multiple, but always ambiguous, indeterminate. The responsibility is thus ceded to us to find life as well as death in the power of the word and with the responsibility, also the authority.

Subversive reading goes beyond even this recognition of responsibility in the face of indeterminacy. In a spirit of serious play, it leads us to revalue the oppressive absolutes of the past and the present by recreating the very terms in which those absolutes are expressed. We thank the tradition which attempted to cast out its strange women for helping us find our name, and thereby reassert our place in that tradition. As one further example of how one might read as a strange woman, Elizabeth Fiorenza offers this reflection on one of the Bible's most misogynistic comments. Ben Sira, author of the Deutero-canonical book Christians call *Ecclesiasticus opines*.

> From woman is the beginning of sin because of her all die (Sir 25:24).

What would happen if tricky readers were daring enough to embrace rather than reject this statement? If we said, yes, human reality does include evil and death, and woman encompasses them, just as she encompasses goodness and life. Woman does indeed represent all of human reality. To turn the text's seemingly ultimate condemnation to the cause of a caricatured ultimate empowerment is to take a stand in the tradition with a sense of both humour and justice, the defining traits of the trickster. It replicates, moreover, the courage of our forebears in claiming the name "Christian", initially a derogatory term used against them by the Romans.

Finally, the hermeneutical model of the strange woman, the trickster, may contribute to mediating the tension between the inclusiveness and a critical perspective that runs through feminist hermeneutics. To read the Bible as strange woman is to read through it to see the continuing paradox that persists in the lives of women and men today.

In Proverbs, we are met first by the strong, exalted, almost deified figure of woman wisdom, surely the apex of biblical female imagery. It is good but then we confront her opposite, the strange woman, and begin to fear that once again women are being used by male authors to support their own place of power in the social structures, and the view

of reality that supports it. Reading as a strange women opens yet a third possibility, a positive valuation of women's power as anti-structural, regenerative because of its lliminality. Again we face paradox: what structures are being regenerated by this laminality. It is all too convenient for the beneficiaries of an unjust power structure to give laminality its due in order to draw on its power for themselves.

The reality is that all of those conflicting forces are at work in the mix of human life, which is one reason why feminists have no choice but to acknowledge varied courses of resistance to the patriarchal system, the sum of which may finally generate real change. Some choose to separate themselves, to live on the margins of patriarchy. Women and men turn their backs on biblical faith, developing spiritualities that reflect their lives and serve their needs as persons who condemn the ways of those who own the centre. Christians cannot ignore the challenge of those who have moved to the margins, though there is danger in this choice. For in removing laminality from the centre of the world, one abdicates the power to transform the world. Perhaps a new world is possible. Others choose to work within the system, to become pastors and lay leaders of churches, to teach in seminaries, scalping a new reality within the old. This again is a valid choice, but only paradoxically so: the power that might transform the world also helps to support its present form, but perhaps the gain will outweigh the loss. In either case, there is an energy for change that comes when strange woman seize the paradox of women's existence, draw on the power of our laminality for women, read the Bible as tricksters, and teach others to do so also.

4.6.4 Conclusion

I agree with Bird to conclude that the Bible has come to play less of a role in the lives of North Americans today. For most it is simply irrelevant. For feminists it is, however, a sign of patriarchal bondage, identified with the past to which we cannot and will not return.

The continuing hold of the Bible on the hearts and minds of a minority Christian population today is seen as a threat by many feminists, because it marks the line of most aggressive resistance to feminist goals and evokes divine sanction for its programme. Feminists rightly see a convergence or conflation of cultural and religious norms in the Bible, which sanctions the subordination of women by prescription and examples (Bird 1994:40). "Fiorenza makes experience and more particularly the personally and politically reflected experience of oppression and liberation the criterion of appropriateness for biblical interpretation and evaluation of Biblical authority" (Bird 1994:75).

4.7 FEMINIST VIEW AND BIBLICAL LANGUAGE

Language is one of the sharpened weapons and instruments of understanding in any theology with special reference to feminist theology. The role of language, symbol and metaphor are of supreme importance in feminist theology. Women have learnt about the power of naming as they struggle to have their experience heard in a male-defined world. They have found that the more language and its use are examined, the more apparent it becomes that making meaning through language is no simple task. "The fact that meaning is made in a certain way has profound implications for how we see the word" (Thistlethwaite 1987:533).

We cannot know reality apart from our own particular intellectual constructions of it and our thinking is formed by socially-conditioned linguistic rules and metaphors. Language or discourse thus actually constructs reality as well as describes it.

In a discussion on deconstruction, Sallie McFaque (1987:26) approaches the question of language as follows: "I agree with deconstructionists that all constructions are metaphorical and hence miss the mark. I nevertheless disagree with them when they say that language (writing) is about only itself and that no construction is any better than any

other. To claim that all constructions are metaphorical is to insist that one never experiences reality "raw", it does not follow from this, however, that there is nothing outside language. All that follows is that our access to reality, is in every case mediated and hence partial and relative".

Quite clearly the choices made in selecting key words and the way in which they are explained and defined will depend entirely on the category called 'women's experience' and on particular hermeneutical choices. The phrase 'women's experience' is in itself problematic. Women are separated everywhere by race, class and economic status (Parenti 1978:69) and great caution must be exercised not to overemphasise the universal at the cost of the particular when referring to the experience of women. I therefore agree with Bell Hooks (1984:35) that "Sexist oppression is of primary importance not because it is the basis of all other oppression, but because it is the practice of domination most people experience, whether their role be that of discriminator or discriminated against, exploiter or exploited".

Confines of space do not permit justice to be done here to the variety and complexity of feminist hermeneutics. Suffice it to say that the critical principle chosen for a feminist hermeneutic is that women are fully human: the twin values of equality and mutuality based on a search for justice and liberation. Jesus Christ's injunction "You must love your neighbour as you love yourself" (Mark 12:31) is understood as laying the foundation for equality and mutuality based on justice, because love is the praxis of right relation and love is justice. "Justice is the moral act of love" (Heyward 1982:18).

Professor Throckmorton in his essay as quoted by Mary Boys (1963:539) argues that the androcentric Hebrew and Greek language of the Bible must be translated into gender neutral English if the intention of the biblical text is to be represented, evokes the paradoxical saying of Rabbi Judah ben Ilai. She bases her argument on the idea of the theory of translation and the authorship and origin of the Bible especially as presented

by Du Plessis (1993:12) that there are three phases: first the actual events or words which is the reality; secondly the tradition or proclamations by the Church; and then thirdly the recording of these material. Du Plessis argues that there is a long time and many developments and number of decades between phase one and the recording phase three.

During this long time, many things happen which can change or influence the nature of the recording. For example, when you write, the author him/herself has influence in his/her writing especially his/her experience, faith and the situation of his/her community to which he/she is writing. The culture and philosophies of life for the time also can influence the content and ideas of what you are writing, especially if you have the specific aim or purpose in mind. That is why Throckmorton says "If one translates a verse literally, the translator is a liar, if one adds thereto, the translator is a blasphemer and a libeller" (Boys 19:539). This argument is a mind opener on the question of reliability of the Bible in matters of faith and especially when taking the experience of the women into serious consideration. Precisely because words; those sensitive and fragile symbols fraught with so much weight, matter so much. A greater burden encumbers a translator of biblical text because their task involves not merely rendering an ancient document intelligible but also requires providing a basis for the ongoing interpretation essential to the life of the community for whom that text is sacred and normative, that is, function as Scripture.

Consequently, I will argue, the fundamental issue at stake in regard to language and the Bible is one of authority. To inquire about language and the Bible involves asking fundamental questions about the ways in which that sacred text "speaks" to a community. To situate the problem more specifically: if the Bible arose out of a patriarchal milieu and thus is androcentric in perspective, language and content, then how today, in a world becoming more sensitive to the tragic and sinful nature of patriarchy, can this same Bible shape believers in a faith that is justly inclusive.

Boys emphasises and articulates clearly that the "voice" of God speaking in the human language of the Bible is first and foremost for the hearing of the community of believers. Here Du Plessis agrees with her and says that the history is not about something but is always history for something (Du Plessis 1993:6).

She goes on to argue that the biblical text in and of itself is not to be equated with God's word (Boys 1963:540). One articulation of this distinction regards the text as an instrument mediating God's self-disclosure. Thus the knowledge sought from Scripture is not merely a knowledge of the text but the knowledge fostered by the text (see Charles M Wood, *The formation of Christian understanding : An Essay in Theological Hermeneutics*. Philadelphia: Westminster 1981:40-41).

One may, therefore, never make the text an idol, precisely because the text plays a mediating function. The interpreter's task is to wrestle with the question "behind" the text. One is concerned primarily with the meaning of the text itself, not simply with the author's. Thus for example, in the scene of the foot-washing in the fourth Gospel, the primary question confronting the interpreter is not whether Jesus actually washed his disciples feet or actually spoke the discourse which follows in chapter 14-17, but more truly the interpretation of life and relationships the foot washing presents the truth of that interpretation and the implications for the sake of a scientifically precise rendering of the text but a means by which the questions projected by the text become alive for the community. Precision of wording is vital, of course, but it is not an end in itself.

Boys further argues that "not all texts disclose God to the same extent, and thus their revelatory character differs" (Boys 19:541). One cannot lightly pass over the sorrowful tales, like that of Hagar, and any who search the Scriptures for wisdom with regard to the roles of women must grapple with the horror, especially, with God's apparent inactivity. Some stories concerning women in the Bible do not stand alone, because all too often the Scriptures have been used to preserve male domination.

Consequently, as I quoted before, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza claims that revelatory status ought to be accorded only to those texts which have a salvific character, that is, those which liberate people from sin and from social and political oppression. She writes: A feminist theological hermeneutics having as its canon the liberation of women from oppressive patriarchal texts, structures, institutions, and values maintains that - if the Bible is not to continue as a tool for the patriarchal oppression of women - only those traditions and texts that critically break through patriarchal culture and plausibility structures have the theological authority of revelation. The advocacy stance of liberation theologies cannot accord revelatory authority to any oppressive and destructive biblical text or tradition" (Fiorenza 1983:33).

Accordingly, Schüssler Fiorenza maintains, not all texts speak to all situations and to everyone. The biblical writings were intended to serve the community's faith, not to reveal timeless principles nor to transmit historically accurate records. Thus, in preaching, one ought to select those texts that address the questions confronting the community. Further, she continues, the biblical texts alone are not sufficient in providing an adequate understanding of women's roles because they contribute to women's invisibility by transmitting only a small degree of the potentially rich traditions of women's contributions to the early Christian movement. In her famous book, *Bread not Stone*, Fiorenza clearly says: "Much of the information and many of the traditions about the agency of women in the beginnings of Christianity are irretrievable because the patriarchal transmission and redaction process considered these stories and information either as insignificant or as a threat to the gradual patriarchalization of the Christian movement" (Fiorenza 1984:112).

An important contribution of Fiorenza is how she argues about the method used in the translation of the Bible and the androcentric instrumentality. Here, too, are implications for passages which are gender neutral into masculine language, for example, using "man"

when the Hebrew *enosh* or Greek *anthropos* meant "human being". Unfortunately she maintains that of certain texts by mistranslating them in generic language.

Translation ought not be used to cover up the androcentrism of the Scripture. We cannot hide from this limitation: the Bible's androcentricity reflects its human composition.

Schüssler Fiorenza, moreover, argues several points which are complemented by Throckmorton and provide a natural transition to a closer focus on his essay and the specifics of translation. Her thinking might be summarised as follows:

1. Since masculine-biassed God language is no longer understood as generic in our social-cultural content but as "Sexist exclusive", translators must ask whether the biblical text insists on speaking about God in the masculine gender or whether such genderisation and sexualisation of God is against the intention of the biblical texts and its theological contexts. Throckmorton's contention that, for English-speaking people for whom "he" has come to mean solely and exclusively a male being, the pronoun "he" is no longer usable in reference to God, parallels this precisely (Boys 1963:543).
2. A translation which is "historically accurate" must give consideration to the interpretive implications of androcentric language which functioned as inclusive language in a patriarchal culture. In other words, this androcentric inclusivism of an earlier era meant that the presence of women was taken for granted, so that women were mentioned explicitly only in "exceptional" situations. Thus women were included but not mentioned specifically. This has resulted in the invisibility of women.
3. Fiorenza extends this further, maintaining that "any interpretation and translation claiming to be historically adequate to the language character of its sources must understand and translate New Testament androcentric language to the whole as inclusive of women until proven otherwise" (Fiorenza 1984:112). So, for

example, when a passage such as I Cor 11:2-16 speaks of prophets who were women, one must not assume that the rest of chapter 11-14 refers only to male prophets and male charismatic; women have been singled out only in 11:12-16 because their behaviour constituted a special issue in this case. Thus, a historically adequate translation and interpretation will reject a topical approach to women in the New Testament, that is, presuming that the only texts about women are those that mention them explicitly. This goes considerably beyond Trockmorton's proposal that the translator may partially assuage the androcentrism of the Bible by greatly reducing the number of masculine pronouns. Nevertheless, both share an *a priori*: the translator must be aware of the limitations of androcentric language and seek to counter it.

4. Translators must be particularly sensitive to the pervasive androcentrism of modern Western culture that has led to situations such as a devaluation of women's roles of leadership in the early Christian community. Phoebe, to whom the titles *diakonos* and *prostatis* were given in Romans 16:1-3, has generally been regarded as a deaconess, a helper and "pastoral assistant" rather than as an influential leader serving the Church at Cenchreae in the office of deacon. The assumption that leadership in the early Christian communities was male-dominated has made of women such as Phoebe, Prisca, Aquila and Junia helpmates and assistants to the apostles. An alternative assumption is that "women were missionaries, apostles or heads of communities independent of Paula and equal to him.

In conclusion I may say, like Boys, that attentiveness to the androcentric character of the Scripture raises the question of authority to the fore. One cannot gloss over the patriarchal cast of the text, simply because it has moulded them in particular way that causes offense in an era with new sensibilities. Yet this particular mirroring of the human and, therefore, limited expression of God speaking does not preclude the possibility of revelation in Scripture as a whole.

If one discovers religious errors in the Bible, one does not seek to explain them away; one recognises that God is willing to work with human beings in all their limitations. The constitution on Divine Revelation from Vatican II points out that "Scripture's truth resides not in its immunity from error, but in its orientation to human salivation (Vatican II 1966, Fiorenza 1983:10-11).

4.8 FEMINISM AND THE MALENESS OF GOD

My starting point is the fact that women are justified in their complaint that the traditional understanding of our recognised language about God has made them second-class citizens both as members of the human race and as members of the family of God. This is why there is a serious need for depatriarchalisation of theological language and of the Bible itself.

The use of predominantly male language to refer to God within the Christian tradition has been the subject of attention by many feminist writers and biblical scholars, like Sallie McFague, Thistlethwaite, Bell Hooks, Heyward Anne Carr, Rosemary Radford Ruether etc. They note the importance of metaphorical approaches to male imagery for God and the development of metaphors such as "God as friend", perhaps deducing it from the deity and divinity of Jesus Christ from Trinitarian perspective of Christ being the integral person and part of God as presented by especially the Gospel of John (Chapter 1:1-6).

The fundamental feminist question about the maleness of God in the imagery, symbolism and concepts of traditional Christian thought and prayer leads to new reflection on the doctrine of God especially for the Second Millennium theologians. In spite of theological denials of sexuality (or any materiality) in God, the persistent use of masculine pronouns for God and the reaction of many Christians against reference to God as "she" would appear to affirm the "maleness" attributed to God. Carr advocates the idea that "she" is not only as appropriate as "he", but is perhaps necessary to reorient Christian imagination

from the idolatrous implications of exclusively masculine God-language and the dominant effects of the father image in the churches and Christian practice" (Carr 1993:130). A new theory of the thoroughly metaphorical character of religious language has emerged in the light of feminist discussion of the doctrine of God. This theory, according to McFague, argues that traditional analogical understanding has tended to stress the similarity between human concepts and God's own selfhood while a metaphorical theology should focus rather on the God-human relationship and on the unlikeness of all religious language in reference to God even as it affirms some similarity (McFague 1982, Chapter 1:25, 3:22, 3:34 and 4:31 and Ruether 1983:67, 68).

There have been proposals for referring to God as "parent" or as "father and mother" or for the balancing use of feminine language for the Spirit since the Hebrew word for Spirit is grammatically feminine. On the other hand some feminist scholars have urged to move away from parental images entirely since "these are suggestive of childish, says Carr, rather than adult religious dependence" (Carr 1993:130). Carr agues that parental images express the compassion, acceptance, guidance and discipline, they do not express the mutuality, maturity, corporation, responsibility and reciprocity required by contemporary personal and political experience.

One feminist theologian, namely, Ruether argues that there is no adequate name for God at present, given the overwhelming bias of traditional Christian thought about God and suggests the designation God/ess for the matrix and source of all life (Ruether 1983:58, 67). Here we see great similarity in the mental thrust between Ruether and Carr especially on the language about God which is incorrectly on the male side instead of being equally on both masculine and feminine side. They both agree that this kind of address to God is idolatry (see page 66 of *Sexism, God Talk and Feminism and The Maleness of God* by Carr 1993:130-131).

Some feminist theologians call for the use of multiple metaphors and models for God and for the divine-human relationship, since none alone is adequate. The Bible itself uses many different human and cosmic designations, while in fact one metaphor (father) has become the dominant model in Christian thought and practice. One suggestion is the metaphor of God as "friend". There is a biblical basis for this in Jesus' saying about laying down one's life for one's friend (John 15:13) and his reference to the Son of Man as friend of the outcast, tax collectors and sinners (Matthew 11:19). Jesus is the parable of God's friendship with people. This friendship is shown in his parables of the lost sheep, the prodigal son, the good Samaritan, and the enacted parable of Jesus' inclusive table fellowship.

The metaphor of God as friend corresponds to the feminist ideal of "communal personhood", an ideal that entails non-competitive relationships among persons and groups that are characterised by mutuality and reciprocity rather than dualism and hierarchy. "It responds to feminist concerns for expressions of divine-human relations that overcome the images of religious self-denial which have shaped women's experience in patterns of low self esteem, passivity and irresponsibility" (Carr 1993:131). It suggest the ideas of mutuality, self-creation in communities and the creation of ever wider communities with other persons and the world. The theme of God's friendship is intensified in the life and death of Jesus, who reveals a God who suffers for, with, and in people and invites them into a community of suffering with God and for others (Moltmann 1980; 1981). The theme unites theology with feminist spirituality in its emphasis on women's friendship and interdependence as these are related to the reciprocal interdependence of the whole of creation.

In defence of the idea that God is not a male or father as imagined by the church tradition which was interpreted by patriarchy, Ruether says that we must correct the tendency to take verbal images literally, God is like but also unlike any verbal analogy (Ruether 1983:67). This Ruether mentions after her argument that the male image of God is the

verbal image which came into existence influenced by Christian sculpture and painting representing God as a powerful old man with a white beard, even crowned and robed in the insignia of human kings or the triple tiara of the Pope (Ruether 1983:66). God is a person without being imaged or figurely personified by existing social roles. God's being is open-ended, pointing both to what is and to what can be (Ruether 1983:67). Classical Christian theology teaches that all names for God are analogies. She further argues that male words for God are not in any way superior to or more appropriate than female analogies. God is both male and female and neither male nor female. One needs inclusive language for God that draws on the images and experiences of both genders. "God is not male. He is Spirit" (Ruether 1983:67). Ruether expresses the idea that inclusiveness can happen only by naming God/ess in female as well as male metaphors.

The synoptic gospels offer some Biblical examples of such God/ess in female as well as metaphors that are truly equivalent images, that is, "feminine" aspects of a male God (Luke 10:38-42). These examples reflect the innovation of the early Christian movement of including women equally in those called to study the Torah of Jesus. Jesus justifies this practice in the Mary-Martha story, where he defends Mary's right to study in the circle of disciples around Rabbi Jesus in the words "Mary has chosen the better part which shall not be taken from her".

Ruether in her famous book presents the following arguments and suggestions: If all language for God/ess is analogy, if taking a particular human image literally is idolatry, then male language for the divine must lose its privileged place. If God/ess is not the creator and validator of the existing hierarchical social order, but rather the one who liberates us from it, who opens up a new community of equals, then language about God/ess drawn from kinship and hierarchical power must lose its privileged place. Images of God/ess must include female roles and experience. Images of God/ess must be drawn from the activities of peasants and working people, people at the bottom of society. Most of all, images of God/ess must be transformative, pointing us back to our

authentic potential and forward to new redeemed possibilities. God/ess language cannot validate roles of men or women subordination. Adding an image of God/ess as loving, nurturing mother, mediating the power of the strong, sovereign father, is insufficient (Ruether 1983:68-69).

Feminist must question the over reliance of Christianity, especially modern bourgeois Christianity, on the model of God/ess as parent. Obviously any symbol of God/ess as parent should include mother as well as father. Mary Baker Eddy used the term "Mother-Father God" some one hundred years ago (Ruether 1983:69). Mother-Father God has the virtue of concreteness, evoking both parental images rather than moving to an abstraction of parent, which loses effective resonance.

But the parent model for the divine in the sense of Ruether, has negative resonance as well. Ruether feels that it suggests a kind of permanent parent-child relationship to God as I mentioned earlier. It makes God a neurotic parent who does not want us to grow up: "To become autonomous and responsible for our own lives is the gravest sin against God" (Ruether 1983:69). Patriarchal theology uses the parent image for God to prolong spiritual infantilism as virtue and to make autonomy and assertion of free will a sin. Parenting in patriarchal society also becomes the way of enculturating us to the stereotypic male and female roles. The family becomes the nucleus and model of patriarchal relations in society. To that extent parenting language of God reinforces patriarchal power rather than liberating us form it. Ruether's main concern is that we need to start with language for the Divine as redeemer, as liberator, as one who fosters full personhood and, in that context, speak of God/ess as creator, as source of being (Ruether 1983:70).

Feminist theology needs to affirm the God of Exodus, of liberation and new being, but as rooted in the foundation of being rather than as its antithesis. Ruether maintains that the God/ess who is the foundation (at one and the same time) of our being and our new

being embraces both the roots of the material substratum of our existence (matter) and also the endlessly new creative potential (spirit).

The God/ess who is the foundation of our being-new being does not lead us back to a stifled, dependent self or uproot us in a spirit-trip outside the earth. Rather it leads us to the converted centre, the harmonisation of self and body, self and other, self and world. It is the shalom/peace of our being.

Since God radically transcends human experience, no human language, not even that of the Bible, can speak adequately about the Divine (Fiorenza 1995:179). Just as language about Jesus Christ does not introduce a masculine element into the Trinity, Marian - symbolic language must not be used to ascribe femininity or motherhood to a God whose essence is defined as masculine. Just as references to the Lamb of God do not introduce animalistic features or speaking of God as light does not suggest an astral element, so also anthropomorphic God-language must not be misunderstood as maintaining femininity or masculinity as an attribute of the Divine (Fiorenza 1995:180). It suffices neither to reject masculine God-language nor to speak about God positively as Goddess. Divinity is always greater and always more than human language and experience can express. This excess of the Divine calls for a conscious proliferating and amplification of images and symbols for God derived not only from human life but also from nature and cosmological realities.

4.8.1 Jesus' Use' of the Title' Father' for' God'

Jesus introduced the widespread use of the father-metaphor for God, but in a new way, obscured by translation and subsequent history. With the word "Abba", he expresses a special intimacy with God. Little Jewish kids called Daddy and Mommy 'Abba' and 'Imma' in Aramaic. By using child's word for this relationship with his 'Daddy God', Jesus frees us touse whatever metaphor best expresses our confidence in God. When

Jesus invites us to pray 'Our Abba, hallowed be Thy name' he invites us to a uniquely personal relationship with God.

How ironic, then, that Abba translate into Greek as 'Pater', the same title ascribed to pater Zeus, who thunders from afar. As the Church acquired a secular power, the 'Daddy Abba' became more and more a distant patriarch, as illustrated by the God of Milton's "Paradise Lost". There, God the Father presides over the world as if atop a pyramid in which each creature has its proper place in an elaborately descending order. Rulers are God's deputies in nations, and husbands are the deputies in the family (O'Brien 1996:3). So, the Eve of Milton's paradise is to "follow the Right Reason" of Adam, her "head". Milton admits that both Adam and Eve are in God's image, but Eve is less so and Adam's perfection far excels hers in all real dignity.

Thus Jesus' 'Abba/Daddy', often understood as a remote patriarch, virtually eclipsed all other images of God in Christian prayer. The many biblical metaphors for God remind us of the inadequacy of any one metaphor, and of the necessity for complementary ones.

O'Brien feels that we must broaden our images and make practical changes in gender issues (O'Brien 1996:3). By retrieving surviving feminine images of God and investing new ones, we do not seek to replace masculine images, but to avoid limiting God and idolizing men.

He further suggests that we must free the liturgy of all exclusively masculine language. The argument against universalizing language (Saying "people" for "men", for instance) is that male words include women, or that the issue is too trivial. Words mean what people agree they mean, and the exclusion of half the human race is not trivial. What sexist language does is to subsume one entire body of people under the identity of another, denying individuality and obscuring independent existence.

Eventually, women's ministries will range from catechists to deacons and priests. When we as Church understand that the New Testament restricted the word 'priest', *iereus* to Jesus; when we understand how fluidly the Church used *diakonia*, its only word for 'authority, service' or 'office', all kinds of changes in Church offices are possible.

4.9 THE LIMITATIONS OF FEMINIST THEOLOGY

Although Feminist Theology has made an important critique of the sexist limitations of the dominant theologies of Europe and North America, it is not without serious limitations, especially when evaluated in the light of Black women's experience (Grant 1989:195). What are these limitations and how serious are they, especially as they are related to Christology? In this part of my work, I will discuss these limitations and in my concluding remarks, point the way towards a theology that is grounded in Black women's experience.

Feminist Theology is inadequate for two reasons: it is white and racist (Grant 1989:195-201).

4.9.1 Feminist Theology as White Theology

Feminist theologians are white in terms of their race and in terms of the nature of the sources they use for the development of their theological perspectives. Although there are sharp differences among feminist theologians, as we have seen, they are all of the same race and the influence of their race has led them to similar sources for the definition of their perspectives on faith. Of course, chief among the sources is women's experiences. However, what is often not mentioned is that feminist theologians' sources for women's experience refer almost exclusively to white women's experiences. White women's experience and black women's experiences are not the same. Indeed all experiences are unique to some degree, but in this case the difference is so radical that

it may be said that white women and black women are in completely different realms. Slavery and segregation have created such a gulf between these women, that white feminists' common assumptions that all women are in the same situation with respect to sexism is difficult to understand when history so clearly tells us a different story.

4.9.2 Feminist Theology and Racism

It would be inaccurate to assert that because feminist theology is white, it is also racist. To be white does not necessarily mean by be racist, though the behaviour of whites makes the distinction difficult. Nevertheless, my claim that feminist theology is racist is best supported by a definition of racism.

Racism, according to Joel Kovel "is the tendency of a society to degrade and do violence to people on the basis of race, and by whatever medications may exist for this purpose" (Grant 1989:199). These medications are manifested in different forms, and are carried on through various media: the psychology, sociology, history, economics and symbolism of the dominant white group. Racism is the domination of distinction. It is not only individual acts but a collective, institutionalised activity. As C Eric Lincoln observed, "for racism to flourish with the vigour it enjoys in America, there must be an extensive climate of acceptance and participation by large numbers of people who constitute its power base. It is the consensus of racism is the power conceded by those respectable citizens who by their actions or inaction communicate the consensus which directs and empowers the overt bigot to act on their behalf".

Even if some individual feminists are not racists, the movement has been so structured, and therefore takes on a racist character. In a racist society, the oppressor assumes the power of definition and control while the oppressed is objectified and perceived as a thing. As such, white women have defined the movement and presumed to do so no only for themselves but also for non-white women. They have misnamed themselves by

calling themselves feminists when in fact they are white feminists, and by appealing to women's experience when in fact they appeal almost exclusively to their own experience. To misname themselves as feminists who appeal to women's experience is to do what oppressors always do: it is to define the rules and then solicit others to play the game. It is to presume a commonality with oppressed women that oppressed women themselves do not share. If white women's analysis were adequate, they would be more precise in naming their own movement and would not presume to name or define the experiences of others. They have simply accepted and participated in the racism of the larger American society when they have done so. This partially accounts for the negative response which black women have had with respect to feminism.

Brenda Eichelberger identifies five categories of reasons that lead to black women's rejection of white feminism.

1. Class differences mean that while black women are dealing with survival issues,
2. negative imagery of black women derived from physical and cultural stereotypes has resulted in the debased treatment of black women,
3. the naivete, or basic lack of knowledge of black women about the womens' movement results in their inability to see the relationship between feminist issues and the black struggle,
4. black women perceive white feminists to be racists who are interested in them only in order to accomplish the white women's agenda,
5. there is a concern that an alliance of black women with white women in a feminist agenda may be detrimental to black men and therefore divisive of the black community.

The hostility towards the feminist movement elaborated by some critics focuses on its implications for family life. Many view feminism as a direct threat to black family life. Sociologist Iva Carruthers refers to feminism as "one of the most serious assaults on

African familyhood" (J.P. p 201). This feminist movement, she maintains is a "white family affair" and is therefore totally irrelevant to the real needs of black women. Deborah Hines distinguishes between black women's reality and white women's reality (Grant 1989:201).

Black women find it extremely difficult to ally themselves with those who say, we have all suffered the same, when we know it is not so. They are being told that apples and oranges are the same, when they can see that they are not the same. You can't easily substitute one for the other in a recipe. Their odours and tastes are different. They appeal to people differently. Even a blind person can tell them apart. Yet a steady stream of rhetoric is aimed at convincing black women how much alike their lives, experiences, wishes and decisions are to those of our stepsisters.

To say that many black women are suspicious of the feminist movement, then, is to speak mildly about their responses to it. Put succinctly, women of the dominant culture are perceived as the enemy. Like their social, sexual and political white male partners, they have as their primary goal the suppression, if not oppression, of the black race and the advancement of the dominant culture. Because of this perception, many believe that black feminism is a contradiction in terms.

4.9.3 Towards A New Black Women's Consciousness

In spite of the negative responses of black women to the white women's liberation movement described, there has been a growing feminist consciousness among them, coupled with the increased willingness to do an independent analysis of sexism (Grant 1989:201). This is creating an emerging black perspective on feminism. Black feminism grows out of black women's tri-dimensional reality of race/sex/class. It holds that full human liberation cannot be achieved simply by the elimination of any one form of oppression. Consequently, real liberation must be broad in the concrete. It must be based

upon a multi-dimensional analysis. Recent writings by secular black feminists have challenged white feminist analysis and black race analysis, particularly data from black women's experience that has been historically ignored by white feminists and black male liberationists.

A review of a selected group of literature follows. The first of these publications: *The Black Woman* (1970), an anthology collected by Toni Cade was representative of a variety of disciplines and perspectives. It broke the silence of black women, declaring that they have a voice that must be heard apart from black men and white women. Later Ntozake Shange published: *For Coloured Girls Only who have Considered Suicide when the Rainbow is Enuf* (1975), following controversial responses to its production on Broadway. In this choreo-poem, Shange exposes the pains and struggles of black women in black male/female relationships. Criticised for lacking a social and political context, her poem focussed exclusively upon the physical and especially psychological strains of black women. The work's significance, however, it exposed some of the internal problems of the black community as they relate to sexism.

Barbara Smith's essay "Towards a Black Feminist Criticism" (1970) should be noted because it represented the beginnings of an emergent black feminist theoretical perspective. She articulated an approach to literature that embodies the realisation that the politics of sex as well as the politics of race and class are crucially interlocking factors in the words of black women writers.

In 1978, Sharon Harley and Rosalyn Terburg-Penn edited *Afro-American Women*, a book of historical and biographical essays which addressed some issues of race and sex in the labour force, the women's movement, and the white community and black communities. They also provided some data on the contributions of black women. In the same year Michelle Wallac, from a perspective similar to Shange's published a controversial critique of the Black Liberation Movement. In her book, *Black Macho and the Myth of*

the Superwoman, she attributed the plight of black women bo black men's exaggeration of white patriarchally prescribed rules for men, which results in black male machoism.

By 1981 several other major publications appeared that developed a critique inclusive of the issues of racism, sexism and classism. Angela Davis' *Women Race and Class* explored the interrelationships between racism, sexism, and labour issues, and is aimed particularly at identifying the class bias that affects the analysis of women's histories. Bell Hook's *Ain't I A woman? : Black Women and Feminism* simultaneously challenged the white woman's liberation movement for its racism and the black liberation movement for its sexism. The following year, this, tri-dimensional analysis was extended in an essay entitled "all the women are white, and all the blacks are men, but some of us are brave" (J.Y. p 203) published in a volume edited by Gloria Hull, Patricia Scott and Barbara Smith. These essays seek to advance black women's studies, by clarifying how analysis of racism, sexism and classism may genuinely illumine black women's reality. More who received the Pulitzer Prize, portrays the troubles of a black girl/woman entangled in an oppressive web created by the racism of white America, but in doing so she focussed clearly upon the brutal sexism of black men. In her subsequent collections of prose, *In Search of our Mother's Garden*, Walker proposes the term womanist in contradiction to feminist, to denote feminists of colour.

The publications of black feminists continued to escalate. In 1984 a significant historical volume on black women appeared by Paula Giddings, entitled *When and Where I enter*. This work is an historical account of the impact of black women on race and sex in America. She chronicles these struggles through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Another significant work of literary analysis is Gloria Wode-Gayles; *No Crystal Stair*: *Visions of Race and Sex in Black Women's Fiction*. She examines the conditions, contradictions and challenges of black women from 1946 to 1976, though literature. Most recently, Bell Hooks published her second volume *Feminist Theory : From Margin*

to Centre, that continues to identify the limitations of bourgeois while feminism and explores the broader implications of a feminism based upon a multi-dimensional analysis of oppression.

In few of the above mentioned writings do black women imply only a gender analysis to treat black women's reality. Whereas Shange focuses chiefly upon sexism, Wallace, like Walker, presumes that white racism has had an adverse affect upon the black community in a way that confuses and reinforces the already existing sexism. Harley Terborg Penn, Giddings and Wade-Gayles all recognise the inclusiveness of the oppressive reality of black women as they endure racism and sexism and economic oppression. Smith, Hull, Hooks and Davis particularly explore the implications of this tri-dimensional oppression of black women. It is clear that through this and other works, black women have either articulated black feminist perspectives or have developed grounds for doing so. These perspectives, however, have not led to the resolution tensions between black women and white women.

Womanists were Sojourner Truth, Jarena Lee, Amada Berry Smith, Ida B Wells, Mary Church Terrell, Mary McLeod Bethune, Fannic Lou Hamer and countless others not remembered in any historical study. A womanist then is a strong black woman who has sometimes been mislabeled as a domineering, castrating matriarch. A womanist is one who has developed survival strategies in spite of the oppression of her race and sex in order to save her family and her people (Grant 1989:205). Walker's womanist notion suggests not the feminist but the active struggle of black women that makes them who they are. For some black women that may involve being feminine as traditionally defined; for others it involves being masculine as stereotypical defined. In either case, womanist just means being and acting out who you are. It is to be part of womanist tradition that black women must strive for the participation in theology.

4.10 AN APPRAISAL OF FEMINISM

With increasing self-confidence and sophistication, feminist study of the Bible has blossomed to become one of the most important new areas in contemporary biblical research. Over the last twenty-five years biblical scholarship by women has come into its maturity. Not only are women prominent in the discussions of traditional topics in biblical studies, but the new questions women have posed and the new ways of reading that women have pioneered have challenged the very way biblical studies are done, for example, women were convinced that feminism and social justice are inextricably linked.

Their Christology offer a radical critique of historical and contemporary male-articulated Christologies. Feminist Christology challenged the theological community to take a new look at women's experience in relation to theology and Christology. When taken as a legitimate source for doing theology, women's experience gives theology a radically different twist. To be sure, even in the white world, women's experience is not a monolith. Consequently, the particular background and context of different women result in varying perspectives in the feminist camp. Regardless of the differences, however, they share certain commonalities which keep them identified as feminist.

It promoted the understanding of women and women participation in the matters and praxis of church life which resulted into their ordination as true ministers of the Word of God. Not only do we notice their self promotion in the church sphere, but also in the social, political and economic arena. We see the prominence and the coming-out of women as active participators and transformers.

The new interpretation and understanding of God, Jesus, Church, authority, ministry which we have today, we owe to feminist theology. It was also promoted self-awareness and women potentiality, both physical or mental. It has brought to light some new models which reflect our true humanity and the holistic nature and characters of society.

These models have tended to reinforce the concept of male and female according to categories of tasks and characteristics, and have thus also fallen into the trap of being hierarchical in practice and not reflecting the freedom we have in Christ. A model in which women and men are partners in the tasks given us in creation is acceptable. This is supported by the biblical view of each person as unique, with their own qualities, gifts and callings. Therefore we may go on to say that:

1. In Christ there are no barriers of race, sex, class, age or nationality.
2. The equal value of human beings must be affirmed in society.
3. In Christ we are new creations for partnership with God and with one another, recovering our identity as human beings.
4. New life in Christ is based on all participating in Christ through the transforming power of the spirit.

The new approach to theology which affects a relatively new understanding of Scripture and Church tradition has proved reliable, helpful and encouraging when applied to, for example, the teaching of the early chapters of the Bible (Genesis 1 and 1) about creation, the Eucharist, the revision of our services of Baptist and Confirmation, family life and many others.

This new approach is common to most major Christian churches, and has enabled them to survive and grow in today's scientifically orientated world. By its careful critical research into the origins of Christian belief and practice this approach has enabled the leaders of the church, with God's blessing, to review and revitalise much of our life and practice.

Because of the attempts made by feminism especially in matters of culture which did not allow women to be ordained as priests, culture has been viewed as dynamic and open to change. In such circumstances women have found new roles in the church and in the

community. Conservative cultural norms should not therefore be viewed as a major obstacle to women's ordination to the priesthood. Women priests could serve in congregations which are ready to receive their ministry.

Their commitment to feminism has taught us not only to value expertise but also to be wary of the elitism that often goes with it. Their work could be shaped in dialogue with the laywomen, clergy women and students for whom their writings were intended.

Women could be active in bible studies, and they could learn to articulate their experiences and have power to liberate themselves using the very Scripture as the tool and weapon for self expression.

They could write the women's Bible which widened the spectrum of women's studies and motivated many women to seek their identity in the world, before God and before their counterparts.

Feminist biblical interpretations makes explicit that divine truth and revelatory presence are found among women, who are the invisible members of the people of God. It was made explicit that the receivers and proclaimers of revelation are not solely men but also women. It has thus sought to interrupt and break the theological silence and ecclesial invisibility of women so that God's grace and truth is been revealed among us in all its fullness.

The critical rereading of the Bible from feminist position and from women's perspective has been a process of uncovering lost traditions and correct mistranslations, of peeling away layers of androcentric scholarship and has rediscovered new dimensions of biblical symbols and theological meanings. In Bible study groups, sermons, and seminars, women rediscover their biblical heritage and realise that this heritage is part of our power today. The rediscovery on a popular and academic level has been made possible by two

basic shifts, in our perception of the world and reality and in our perception of the function of biblical texts and interpretations. Such paradigm shifts are on the one hand a shift from an androcentric to a feminist perception of the world, and on the other hand a shift from an apologetic focus on biblical authority to a feminist articulation of contemporary women's experiences and struggle against patriarchal oppression in biblical religion.

4.11 SUMMARY

Fiorenza (1983:xv) in her search of women's heritage emphasises that a fundamental methodological insight of historical criticism of the Bible was the realisation that the sitz im lebem or life setting of a text is as important for its understanding as its actual formulation.

Fiorenza (1983) formulated the various models of Biblical interpretation. The first model which she call the doctrinal approach, understands the Bible in terms of divine revelation and canonical authority. However, Fiorenza (1983:4) argues that the Bible conceives of biblical revelation and canonical authority in a historical, dogmatic terms. In its most consistent forms it insists on the verbal inspiration and literal-historical inerrancy of the Bible. The biblical text is not simply a historical expression of revelation but revelation itself.

The second model, that of positivist historical exegesis, was developed in confrontation with the dogmatic claims of Scripture and the doctrinal authority of the church. Its attack on the revelatory authority of Scripture is linked with an understanding of exegesis and historiography that is positivist, factual, objective, and value-free. This model according to Fiorenza (1983:5) seeks to achieve a purely objective reading of the texts and a scientific presentation. This insight was developed by the third model, that of dialogical

hermeneutical interpretation. This model reflects on the interaction between the text and community, or text and interpreter.

The last model is that of liberation theology which challenged the objectivity and value neutrality of academic theology. Fiorenza (1983:6) feels that the basic insight of all liberation theologies, including feminist theology, is the recognition that all theology, willingly or not, is by definition always engages for or against the oppressed.

Concerning sexism and God-language Ruether (1983:70) argues that the parent model for the divine has negative resonance as well. According to Ruether it suggests a kind of permanent parent-child relationship to God. God becomes a neurotic parent who does not want us to grow up. To become autonomous and responsible for our lives is the gravest sin against God. Patriarchal theology uses the parent image for God to prolong spiritual infantilism as virtue and to make autonomy and assertion of free will a sin. Parenting in patriarchal society also becomes the way of enculturing us to the stereotypic male and female roles.

As far as Christology is concerned, Ruether (1983:120-137), articulated that fundamentally, Jesus renews the prophetic vision whereby the Word of God does not validate the existing social and religious hierarchy but speaks on behalf of the marginalised and despised groups of society. Jesus proclaims an iconoclastic reversal of the system of religious status. The last shall be first and the first last. The leaders of the religious establishment are blind guides and hypocrites. The outcasts of society - that is, prostitutes, publicans, Samaritans are able to hear the message of the prophet. This reversal of social order does not just turn hierarchy upside down, but it aims at a new reality in which hierarchy and dominance are overcome as principles of social relations.

Jesus revises God-language by using the familiar Abba for God. He speaks of the Messiah as servant rather than king to visualise new relations between the divine and the

human relation to God no longer becomes a model for dominant-subordinate relations between social groups, leaders and the led. Rather, relation to God means we are to call no man "Father, Teacher, or Master" (Matt 23:1-12). Relation to God liberates us from hierarchical relations and makes us all brothers-sisters of each other. Those who would be leaders must become servants of all.

The role played by women of marginalised groups is an intrinsic part of the iconoclastic, messianic vision. It means that the women are the oppressed of the oppressed. They are the bottom of the present social hierarchy and hence are seen in a special way, as the last who will be first in the Kingdom of God.

Ruether (1983:137) Jesus speaks to and is responded to by low-caste women because they represent the bottom of this status network and have the least stake in its perpetuation.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 A CRITIQUE OF WOMANIST THEOLOGY

The following womanist theologians will be discussed in this chapter, namely Delores Williams and Jacquelyn Grant.

5.1.1 Delores Williams

She is a womanist systematic theologian. She challenges black theologians to re-examine the biblical sources of Christian traditions for a black liberation theology that could be inclusive of the liberation of black women.

5.1.2 Jacquelyn Grant

She is a lecturer in Systematic Theology at the inter-denominational Theological Centre, where she is also a founder and director of black women in Church and society, a programme geared towards the leadership development of black women in the Church. She is a womanist biblical scholar who tackles womens exclusion from Church Ministry and Society from a theological viewpoint.

5.2 HERMENEUTICS IN WOMANIST THEOLOGY

5.2.1 The Starting Point for Womanist Theology

According to Akke van der Kooi (1997:9) and Grant (1989:209) Black women must do theology out of their tri-dimensional experience of racism, sexism/classism. To ignore any aspect of these experiences is to deny the holistic and integrated reality of black womanhood. When black women do theology and ignore classism, this would render

their theology meaningless and irrelevant to the majority of black women, who are themselves poor and marginalised. There are the daily struggles of poor black women which must serve as the gauge for the verification of the claims of womanist theology.

In a chapter entitled "Black Woman Shaping Feminist Theory", Hooks (1981) according to Grant (1989:209) elaborates on the inter-relationship of the threefold oppressive reality of black women and shows some of the weaknesses of white feminist theory. Challenging the racist and classist assumption of white feminism, Hooks writes:

> Racism abounds in the writings of white feminists, reinforcing white supremacy and negating the possibility that women will bond politically across the ethnic and racial boundaries. Past feminist refusal to draw attention to and attack racial hierarchy suppressed the link between race and class. Yet class structure in American society has been shaped by the racial politics of white supremacy.

This means that black women, because of oppression determined by race and their subjugation as women, make up a disproportionately high percentage of the poor and working classes.

However, the fact that black women are a subjugated group, even within the black community and the white women community, does not mean that they are alone in their oppression within those communities. In the women's community white women are marginalised, and in the black community poor black men are also discriminated against. This suggests that classism as well as racism and sexism, has a life of its own.

Consequently, simply addressing racism and sexism is inadequate to bring about total liberation. Even though there are dimensions of class which are not directly related to race or sex, classism impacts black women in a peculiar way which results in the fact that they are most often then not on the bottom of the social and economic ladder.

Because it is important to distinguish black and white women's experience, it is also important to note these differences in theological and Christological reflections. To accept the difference between black and white women's perspective in theology, I maintain that black women scholars should follow Alice Walker by describing their theological activity as "womanist theology". It accents, as Walker says, our being responsible, in charge, outrageous, courageous and audacious enough to demand the right to think theologically and to do it independently of both white and black men and white women (King 1993:77).

Teresa Okure, presented a paper on "Women and the Bible" in 1985 at the Anglophone Consultation in Port Harcourt. In the discussions of this paper which lays a foundation or cornerstone of womanist hermeneutics, efforts were made to reread the biblical stories concerning women from Afric an women's perspective. The paper discusses, first, the constitutive significance of Eve for a study of women in the Bible, then the liberative and oppressive elements in the Bible with respect to women, and, finally, new hermeneutical principles for reading the Bible as a patriarchal book. I will follow this design of Okure in my discussion of womanist biblical hermeneutics.

5.2.2 The Constitutive Significance of Eve

The story of Eve, the first woman created by God (Gen 2:22) and named "mother of all the living" (Gen 3:20), constitutes a natural starting point for a study on women in the Bible. Throughout the centuries, and in the Judeo-Christian traditions in particular, the story of her creation and fall has been used as the divine norm for determining the role and the status of women in church and society. Traditional and popular belief views Eve, woman, as a inferior being to Adam, the man, physically, socially, morally, intellectually, and spiritually. Details of this inferiority are meticulously worked out by the Rabbis and by the fathers of the church, whose teachings have formed and nourished centuries of opinion concerning women.

Reasons offered for this belief are that the man was created first, the woman second, out of the man's rib, and so destined to serve merely as his helper (Gen 2:7; 20-22). Accordingly, the woman is said to have no identity of her own, but to derive her being from the man and exist only for him: to serve his personal and domestic needs and bear and rear his children. Her formation from the man's rib, rather than from his head, for instance, is seen by the rabbis as symbolic of her essentially inferior status, lest she be proud or "that she should be modest" (Okure 1985:48). On the evidence of I Corinthians 11:7-9, and contrary to Genesis 1:26-27, it is emphatically maintained that only the man is in the image of God, while the woman is merely the image of man. Finally, it is observed that as the morally weaker sex, Eve, not Adam, succumbed to the devil's decent and so became the cause of sin and death in the world. All the ills of humanity, including the sinfulness of the man himself are thus to be blamed on the woman.

Okure (1985:49), contests that "this belief in the innate inferiority of the woman and in her exclusive instrumentality for sin and death is based on a misreading of the Genesis accounts of creation and the fall (Gen 1:26 0 249; 2:46-4:2,5:1-2), and on failure to discern the distinctive purpose of each of these narratives. For the creation accounts taken at their face value furnish no grounds whatever for this belief. Rather, they make fundamental statements concerning the nature of humanity in relation to God and the rest of creation, and concerning the personal relationship between man and woman. Engelbrecht (1987:30), concurs with Okure. He argues that the purpose of the creation was for the Sabbath not for the sake of story according to the priestly source.

The first creation account (Gen 1:26-2:46, 5:1-2) makes the theological statement that the human species is composed of male and female, that it is a unity in nature and a diversity in sex, and that as an entity it was created in the image and likeness of God. The term Adam in this narrative is clearly a generic term for humanity defined as male and female (5:2). Conjointly created in the image and likeness of God and conjointly given dominion over the rest of creation. (1:28), both the male and the female stand equal in honour and

dignity. It is also conjointly as male and female that both can carry out the divine injunction to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth (1:28), contrary to some rabbis who held that this command applied only to the male.

While the first creation account defines the human species as composed of male and female who stand equal in dignity and honour before God and are given co-mastery over creation as showed above and as main exposition of Okure, she goes further to explain that the second creation account recorded in (Gen 2:4b-24) emphasises the identity in nature of male and female as a species distinct from the rest of the animal species. Secondly Okure feels that (men and women are instructed) by God in the second creation account to belong to each other as husband and wife (Gen 2:23-24). The main point of this second account is to be found in verses 23-24. In other words, the first unit in human society is that of husband and wife. For Okure the two accounts are not contradictory but complementary, and it is from this unit that the family, inclusive of children, develops. For Okure the creation of the woman from the man's rib is the visual imagery and it vividly illustrates both their identity in nature and their destined union as husband and wife in "one flesh" verse 24. One can take the word one to show unity and equality, not the other is greater than the other. If half plus half make one then the "one" which is the product of two halves is united as one, and that in the two halves making one there is no little or smaller half. At the halves are equal to make "one" possible.

If the halves were not equal, the product would be something less than one.

If these are the different thrusts of the two creation accounts, then these accounts cannot be cited in support of the belief that woman is by nature inferior to man (Okure 1985:49). Such a belief arises, rather, from the sociocultural practices of the sinful world in which the biblical authors and then subsequent interpreters lived (Okure, 1985:49). This is the production of a Jewish patriarchal society, which, as we know, was one in which the woman had no legal status, except insofar as she was an object of marriage and an

instrument of child-bearing. She should not, for example, testify in court or inherit property, nor was she expected to keep all the 615 precepts of the Torah. Her sole *raison d'etre* was the husband. She was his "home", and her duty was to secure his happiness and serve him in the meaner and more menial aspects of life. In short, the woman was *de facto* if not *de jure* the property of the husband, for he could acquire her like a slave by money or sexual intercourse and divorce her if she caused the slightest impediment to the marriage, like spoiling his food or growing old.

Clearly this prevailing negative assessment of women is a far cry from the status accorded them in Genesis 1:26-27. How did it all come about? Genesis 3 attempts an explanation. Had Eve alone been guilty, as the church fathers and I Timothy 2:24 for instance, maintain, Adam would not have been personally punished, since God is a just judge.

Strikingly, the woman is given the promise of salvation through her "seed" even before she receives her punishment (Gen 3:15-17). The punishment of her subjection to the husband is clearly a description of the sociocultural reality that obtained in the author's patriarchal society briefly described above. By viewing this subjection as a punishment for sin, the biblical author rejects the idea that this state of affairs could have been the created order willed by God. The divine promise of salvation in Genesis 3:15 was ultimately fulfilled when Jesus, the seed of the woman, Mary, conquered sin and death on the cross and made us all God's children (Gal 4:4).

Thus, as Eve, after the fall, became physically "the mother of all the living" (Gen 3:20), thereby playing a role akin to that of God, the source and giver of life (Ps 36:9; Job 33:4), so, at the annunciation and at the foot of the cross, Mary became spiritually the mother of God's children, as woman, just as in the Old Testament Zion was called "mother" (Ps 87:5). Hence motherhood, the bearing and bringing forth of life, remains a prerogative that God shares exclusively with the woman.

Strikingly, Eve receives the name "mother of all the living" from Adam after the fall. It is as if henceforth all hope of life depended on her (Okure 1985:51). For if death entered the world through one person (Gen 3:19; Rom 5:5), life was to be restored to humanity through the seed of the woman (Gen 3:16; Mt 1:21). If mythologically, the woman was formed from the rib of man (Gen 2:21-22; I Tim 2:14; I Cor 11:8), ontologically every man is born of woman (Mt 11:11; I Cor 11:12). Furthermore, in the Christian tradition all human beings are Mary's children insofar as all are Christ's brothers and sisters. It must not be forgotten that Mary was the only human agent who cooperated with God in the incarnation and birth of Christ. This is a foundational doctrine of our faith. Rightly, then, does the church attach great importance to Mary's role in the work of our redemption, but it needs to be remembered that, however filled with grace, Mary was and remains biologically a woman. In the order of creation, the woman is named Eve (from the root word meaning 'life') because she bring to birth all the living. In the order of redemption, it is fittingly said that they found the child "with Mary his mother" (Mt 2:11). The woman's role in God's scheme of creation and redemption is of paramount importance for humanity. The treatment of her as inferior or of no consequence finds no basis whatever in this scheme (Okure 1985:51).

Recognition of the woman's role in God's scheme of creation and redemption does not, however, imply a denial of the woman's share in the sinfulness of the world. What is contested here is the traditional belief that all the sufferings of humanity are to be attributed to the woman as the sole cause.

As Adam sinned against God, so did Eve, but unlike Adam, Eve was humble enough to admit that she had been deceived.

Traditionally God is not readily loved as humble, self-sacrificing, tender, and compassionate, and since all these virtues are generally associated with the mother, the church should not fear or think that it harms God to be addressed as mother. To call God

a father in the masculine sense is a distortion of the divine image itself (Okure 1985:52). Only when the woman is granted her full honour and dignity in society, will God also come fully into her/his own. Then humanity will no longer be ashamed to recognise and celebrate the womanliness of God, and our knowledge of God will also be enriched, and we shall come to relate to her/him more as the giver and fosterer of life (John 10:10) than as law and order or a power and authority to be feared. In the view of the church fathers, the main reason why the woman cannot image god is that 'image' has to do with authority, and this only the man has (Augustine on Gen 2, pg 54-58) as quoted by Okure (1985:52).

5.2.3 Liberative and Oppressive Elements

Our foregoing analysis of the Bible has revealed the fundamental truth that the Bible and its interpretations embody both a divine and a human element with respect to women. The liberative divine perspective, the oppressiveness stem from the human perspective (Okure 1985:52). The latter are socioculturally conditioned, and in the last analysis, sinful. The liberative elements emphasise the woman's equality with the man, her being made conjointly with him in the image and likeness of God, of equal dignity and honour, and her being given the special privilege, akin to God's, of bearing, mothering, and fostering life. The oppressive and sinful elements, on the contrary, portray her as an inferior being, subjected to the man, having no identity of her own, and ultimately the cause of sin and death. Throughout the Bible we meet side by side the divinely liberative and the humanly oppressive elements concerning women.

On the liberative side, women serve throughout the Bible as God's co-workers and agents of life. In other words, God did not simply create the woman to be the mother of all the living and leave her at that. Rather, in keeping with His distinctive gift to woman of motherhood, God consistently involved women in the divine activity of giving, preserving, and redeeming life. Okure is giving here the example of Rebekah to illustrate

her hermeneutic approach. We are all familiar with the story of how Rebekah helped Jacob to steal the paternal blessing from Isaac (Gen 27:1-29; 31-28, 5). Seen from the twentieth century perspective, her action is not to be condoned, but in the moral code of the time, she would be praised for her ingenuity, which parallels that of Abraham in Egypt when he gives our Sara, his wife, to be his sister and so brings disaster on innocent Egyptians (Gen 12:10-29).

In Rebekah's case, her ingenuity was not directed toward her personal gain. Even before the children were born, God had taken her, not Isaac, into his confidence by revealing to her the destiny of the two children in her womb (Gen 25:23). When therefore Rebekah secures the paternal blessing for Jacob in place of Esau, she is operating with God in her own way to bring about the realisation of the divine plan. In this she compares well with those Israelites who, from our perspective, abused other people in order to enhance their divine election (Judg 18:21-31; 21:16-24). Not only did Rebekah secure Isaac's blessing from Jacob, she also saved him from Esau's destroying anger by sending him to his uncle, Laban, where he won wives from among his own kindred as well as abundant wealth, both important considerations in those days.

Just as Rebekah served as God's instrument at a decisive moment in Israel's history, so did the women at the time of Moses, in a crucial stage of Israel's history, namely, the exodus. This group of women worked concertedly with God in preserving both the life of Israel as a nation and of Moses as God's instrument of liberation for the nation (Exodus 2:1-11) while Pharaoh and his officials are bent on exterminating Israel lest the Israelites become their enemies. The Egyptian midwives, though of Pharaoh's own camp, refuse to comply with his orders to kill every male child of the Hebrews as a result, Moses was kept alive at birth. Moved also by maternal instinct to preserve life, Moses' mother devises a means of hiding the child. He is eventually rescued by Pharaoh's daughter who, unlike her father, is moved with pity for this "Hebrew" boy (2:6). Moses' sister then sees to it that the boy is brought up for Pharaoh's daughter by the boy's own

mother. Thus through the concerted efforts of these women Moses is not only kept alive but also given the best education in the land. Later on, when he flees from Pharaoh, it is Ziphorah who first provides a home for him as his wife, then saves him from God's destroying anger on account of his failure to circumcise his son (Exodus 2:19-22, 4:24-26).

When he comes to the final and greatest stage in salvation history, we meet again another great woman, who cooperated singlehandedly with God in conceiving and giving birth to the author of our salvation, namely, Mary, the mother of Jesus and of the Church; Mary who is both virgin and mother.

In all these instances, God manifests a deep respect for the woman by treating them as individuals in their own right, "God deals directly with them instead of first passing through their husbands" (Okure 1985:53). Mary's case is particularly striking. We recall that in Jewish society the consent in marriage was not normally sought, except as a matter of formality. Yet at the annunciation, God respectfully asks a maiden from Nazareth for her consent to be the mother of God's son and waits for her reply (Luke 1:26-38). The next person to know of this event is Elizabeth, while Joseph is kept in the dark for a long time. Jesus' deep respect for women is also well known. We may for instance, recall his compassion for widows, the most pitiable group of women in Jewish society (Luke 7:11; 21:1-4; Mark 23:14), his respect for sinful Jewish women (Luke 7:36-50; John 8:1-11) and, in particular, for the Samaritan woman (John 4:1-42). In this last case not only does Jesus dialogue publicly with a woman whom any decent Jew would have shunned like the plague (Samaritan women were regarded as a permanent source of contamination (John 4:27), but he also turns this notorious sinner into his effective missionary to the Samaritans (4:28-30; 39-42).

These few examples will suffice to illustrate how God worked with women as co-partners in giving, fostering, preserving, and saving life, yet there are still many other examples.

There is no paternalism whatever in God's or Jesus' treatment of women. For in Jesus' teaching, women as well as men constitute possible objects of God's judgment (Luke 17:34-35). In Judaism, too, although the wife was subjected to the husband in most matters, even with respect to the vows she had made to God (Num 30:3-13), her individual rights were recognised insofar as she could not be barred from participating in feasts on account of the sinfulness of the husband. "Seen aright, that is, from the divine perspective, the Bible embodies nothing but Liberative elements with respect to women" (Okure 1985:54).

The oppressive elements in the Bible, as I have said, stem from the sinful human perspective not from God's perspective. At this point we can cite only two key areas where this oppression is most operative, namely, the institution of marriage and the concern for ritual purity. Cohen rightly observes that the Bible as a patriarchal book means that the husband had absolute authority over his wife (Cohen 1982:167). Indeed, if the books of the Bible can be said to agree on any one issue with respect to women, it is that the woman suffers her greatest humiliations and subjection to the man in the institution of marriage. This is true not only of the foundational statement in Genesis 3:16, but of subsequent biblical traditions right up to the New Testament (I Cor 11:2-12; 14:33b-36; I Tim 2:11-12; Tit 2:2-3), where subjection to the husband in inculcated as a virtue to be performed "in the Lord" (Col 3:18, Eph 5:22). In marriage the husband claims absolute rights not only over a wife as a person, but over her very sexuality. We may, for instance, think of humiliations to which the woman had been subjected before marriage to ensure that she was a virgin (Deut 22:13-21) or the most pitiable treatment of the suspected adulterer prescribed in the Mishnah. The wife had no corresponding rights or sanctions over the husband.

This phenomenon is not peculiar only to Jewish society bu appears to be universal. For if the verdict of the wife's subjection to the husband was attributed to God (Gen 3:16), it was left to the man to work out the details of adultery and divorce. Wisdom literature

is particularly rife with stereotyped tirades against wives, and Sarah in particular, as quoted by Okure (1985:55), extends this against women in general: "Better the wickedness of a man than a woman who does good" (Sir 42:14). This universal phenomenon of the plight of the woman in marriage deserves special study, for the present breakdown in the marriage system all over the world may not be unconnected with the refusal by wives to allow themselves to continue to be treated as the property and slaves of their husbands. Often this legitimate reaction is wrongly interpreted as the woman's rejection of her maternal role. Yet no sane woman, and certainly no African woman, would see anything belittling or derogatory in motherhood *per se*.

Another important area of women's oppression in the Bible is that of cultic purity. Jewish laws concerning ritual purity were particularly biassed against women. Since women were menstruates by nature, they could not be relied upon at all times be ritually clean. For this reason they were barred, as a sex, for life from sacred places and ministries in Judaism (Lev 12:1-8, 15; 19-30). In the Temple, women had their special court, next to that of the unclean Gentiles, beyond which they could not pass. In my view, this concern for ritual purity constituted the single most important factor in the exclusion of women from the ministerial priesthood in Judaism. This point is worth remembering in the current debate on the admission or non-admission of women to the ministerial priesthood.

We know from the New Testament what Jesus thought of ritual purity or of that concept of holiness that emphasises external cleanliness. We think, for instance, of Jesus criticism of the scribes and the Pharisees in Matthew 23:25-27, or of those instances where, contrary to normal Jewish practice, Jesus touched and allowed himself to be touched by those who were legally classified as unclean, such as the woman with the unremitting bleeding (Mk 6:25-34). To continue to exclude women from certain Christian ministries on the basis of reasons which are inspired by outmoded Jewish taboos is to render null and void the liberation that Jesus won for us on the cross and with

subsequent resurrection, and which allows no social and ritual distinctions between male and female, Jew and Gentile, slave and free, since all constitute one person in Christ (Gal 3:26-28).

As in the area of marriage, so in that of ritual purity: the oppression of women appears to be universal, especially in Africa. But in whatever way we look at it, "no oppressive element in the Bible can be attributed to God's will" (Okure 1985:55). God is by nature the liberator of the oppressed. God cannot *ipso facto* be an oppressor in any form. Recognition of this truth has deep pastoral and hermeneutical consequences for our reading of the Bible, which we shall now briefly consider.

Teresa Okure finds the beginning of womanist hermeneutics in the statement that the Bible is a patriarchal book not only because it was written by men (and for the main part for men), but because over the centuries it has been interpreted almost exclusively by men. Her argument is that the human race is not only composed of males but of male and female, each with its own distinctive way of perceiving reality (Okure 1985:56). Her method focuses on a need to correct the imbalance and what she calls impoverishment of Scripture. For her this is caused by this one-sided interpretation which has brought to bear a feminine perspective in the interpretation of Scripture.

Creation of humanity as male and female has consequences that extend beyond the purely biological. It demands that both men and women be involved in every sphere of human endeavour. Nowhere is this more needed than in the theological and scriptural fields where humanity most lives out its likeness to God. Women themselves have a duty to humanity to make their contribution felt in this area.

This provision for womanist hermeneutics will, among other things, help to ensure that those dimensions of God's word that can be properly understood only by women, are brought to light for the benefit of all. Particularly affected will be those stories that

concern women and God's relationship with them as in Gen 2:22, but I will come back to the womanist interpretation of this story later.

It is Okure's contention that the Bible must be re-read, and in the re-reading of the Bible as a patriarchal book, women must sustain their efforts to discern between the divine and the human elements in it (Okure 1985:56). For while the former embodies timeless truths for our salvation the latter inculcates practices that are socio-culturally conditioned, hence inapplicable universally. In what originally she calls the "principle of accommodation", (Okure 1983:56), God puts up with our imperfect knowledge of divinity and divine ways while leading us progressively to an ever fuller or more perfect knowledge. The women issue is clearly an area where God is leading us today to a more perfect knowledge of the divine will. As humanity once co-operated with the old sinful order by belittling the status and significance of women in society, argues Okure, it has now a corresponding duty to co-operate with God in making concrete and visible the reality of the new order restored by Christ (Gal 3:26-28). This demands that serious efforts be made to translate into programmes of action our theological belief in our oneness in Christ within our ecclesial structures. The strength of Okure is deduced in her strong statement that, "it is not only the woman who needs to be liberated from subjection and oppression, the man needs and treats them as inferiors" (Okure 1985:56). Okure argues that this tendency is fundamentally unchristian, basing her argument on (Phil 2:1-12).

Okure goes further to emphasise that the re-reading of the Bible demands that emphasis be placed on the vocation of woman as mother, God's privileged instrument for conceiving and bringing forth life. Women must see themselves, and be seen by men, as closer to God and as co-creators. In the past, insufficient recognition has been given to this singular role of women in society. This emphasis will go hand in glove with sustained efforts to develop and celebrate the motherhood of God. For though, in the final analysis, God is neither man nor woman, the human categories we use to express our knowledge of God help women in their relationship with God. Women's celebration

of the motherhood of God will help them to approach God and Jesus as compassionate, merciful, and tender givers of life and refuge of sinners rather than as mighty lords to be feared and appeased. In general, children (African children in particular) fear and obey their fathers, who have power and authority, but they love and feel most secure with their mothers, who enable growth in them. Okure says: "Let us allow God to be our mother, as well as our father the gain will be wholly ours" (Okure 1985:57).

Okure appeals to women to develop a better image of themselves and of one another. For often women are their own worst enemies in this respect. They need to recognise that it is no honour to God to deny or play down their own God-given dignity and place in society. If they do not lay hold of their destiny, that destiny will never be theirs, and humanity as a whole will continue to be impoverished by its lack. Women must know their rights and it is their responsibility to claim them. They must regard this as a challenge to them.

In struggling for their God-given rights, women must reject all measures that contradict their divine vocation as agents of life or that give the impression that they wish to lord it over men. That would mean simply replacing one sinful system with another. The individual agents in the struggle for the liberation of women form one body where each agent is called upon to study and promote the well-being of the whole, thereby sharing in God's own life-giving activity.

5.3 THE USE OF THE BIBLE IN WOMANIST TRADITION

Theological investigation into the experiences of Christian black women reveals that black women considered the Bible to be a major source for religious validation in their lives (Grant 1989:211). Though black women's relationships with God preceded their introduction to the Bible, this Bible gave some content to their God-consciousness. The source for black women's understanding of God has been twofold; first, God's revelation

directly to them; and secondly, God's revelation as witnessed in the Bible and as read and heard in the context of their experience. The understanding of God as creator, sustainer, comforter and liberator took care of life as they agonised over their pain, and celebrated the hope that, as God delivered the Israelites, they would be delivered as well. The God of the Old and New Testaments became real in the consciousness of oppressed black women. Though they were politically important, they were able to appreciate certain themes of the Bible which spoke to their reality. For example, Jarena Lee, a nineteenth century black woman preacher in the African Methodist Episcopal Church constantly emphasised the theme "Life and liberty" in her sermons which were always biblically based. This interplay of Scripture and experience was exercised by many other black women. An ex-slave woman revealed that when her experience negated certain oppressive interpretations of the Bible given by white preachers, she, through engaging the biblical message for herself rejected whomever distorted the message in order to maintain slavery. Her grandson, Howard Thurman, speaks of her use of the Bible in this way:

> During the days of slavery, the master's minister would occasionally hold services for the slaves. Always the white minister used as his text something from Paul: slaves be obedient to them that are your masters as unto Christ. Then he would go on to show how, if we were good and happy slaves, God would bless us. I promised my maker that if I ever learned to read and if freedom ever came, I would not read that part of the Bible (Grant 1989:212).

What we see here is perhaps more than a mere rejection of a white preacher's interpretation of the Bible, but an exercise in internal critique of the Bible. The Bible must be read and interpreted in the light of black women's own experience of oppression and God's revelation within that context. Womanists must, like sojourners, compare the teachings of the Bible in the light of their own.

To do womanist theology, then, we must read and hear the Bible and engage it within the context of our own experience. This is the only way that can make sense to people who are oppressed. Black women of the past did not hesitate to do this and we must do no less.

Not long ago, Tamez (1994:191) when the Latin American poor burst on the scene of Church life in Latin America, the consciousness of a large number of people was stirred. The Bible took on new meaning. The book which is read by many, but until then assimilated through a safe, unidimensional interpretation controlled by a predominantly unchallenged way of thinking became a simple text that speaks of a loving, just, liberating God who accompanies the poor in their suffering and their struggle through human history. This is not the only new development on their continent. On the contrary, it appears as one more breakthrough in a fast growing movement in Latin America a movement propelled mainly by the strong yearning of the poor for life. For multiple reasons and in many ways, the poor are today stronger than ever in their commitment. This is why they, in Latin America, speak of a new way of being church, of doing theology; of reading the Bible.

A truly liberated reading of the Scripture responds to the situation that has motivated the reading. It seems that, in a context of hunger, unemployment, repression, and war, creativity more than abounds in theology, hermeneutics, liturgy, and the pastoral field. At least this has been the experience of both Catholic and Protestant grassroots communities who provide clear examples of the ways in which the Bible has been, and still is, being rediscovered. The study, discussion, and meditation based on the word has become an integral part of the meetings of the Catholic grassroots Christian Communities. Everybody studies and discusses the Bible from the point of view of liberation. In the progressive Protestant Communities, where the Bible has always been fundamental to the liturgy, hermeneutic keys have changed and the Bible has come to be read from the perspective of the poor. In both communities the Bible has been rediscovered.

Characteristically, their readings are strongly linked to the daily life of the members of these Christian Communities. There is an unquestionable bridge between the life of the people of God in the Old Testament and that of Jesus' followers in the New Testament.

This reading of the word from the point of view of the poor has been consolidated and has become so evident that Holy Scripture is regarded as a threatening or dangerous book by some sectors of society that do not share a preferential option for the poor. These sectors might be either religious or secular, such as the government (particularly in countries where the National Security Doctrine is actively enforced). Some religious circles have even decided to avoid biblical discussions. The question is, do they fear the Bible or are they too lazy to study it themselves? The ancient book of Christianity has indeed become new and defiant when it is read from the perspective of the poor.

However, despite this situation, women with a certain degree of female consciousness have started to raise some questions about the Bible. It is not that they feel included in the main liberation experiences of the Bible; the exodus and the historical role of Jesus. It is that women find clear, explicit cases of the marginalisation or segregation of women in several passages of both the Old and the New Testaments. There are, then differences between reading the Bible from the point of view of the poor and reading it from a woman's perspective (Tamez 1994:191). The poor find that the word re-affirms, in a clear and direct way, that God is with them in their fight for life. Women who live in poverty, however, even when they are aware that the strength of the Holy Spirit is on their side, do not know how to confront the texts that openly segregate them. These texts sound strange and surprising to someone who is not familiar with the culture of the biblical world and believes in a just and liberating God.

This concrete problem has not been regarded as such until recently. First, the discovery of the Bible as 'historical memory of the poor' was greeted with great enthusiasm by both men and women. This discovery implied that it was necessary to discuss a number of

significant biblical texts essential to the history of salvation from a new perspective, starting with those texts where the liberation of the oppressed is most apparent, for example, Exodus, the prophets, and the Gospels. Up until now texts that segregate women have been disregarded and subordinated because the main criterion has been to experience God as a God of life who has a preferential option for the oppressed, including women. Second, only in recent years has a feminine consciousness gained some strength in the theological and ecclesiastical worlds. There have, of course, always been women who have openly questioned the church and theology. This is happening to an increasing decree in our days, especially with the upsurge of liberation theology and the proliferation of grassroots, Christian communities where women are the majority and their participation is key (Tamez 1994:192).

For several reasons this problem of the marginalisation, or segregation, of women is harder to solve than it appears to be. One of the reasons is that our society is extremely sexist: a phenomenon that can be detected at both a tacit and an explicit level, nor are grassroots Christian communities free from this sexist ideology, which has deep historico-cultural roots that are hard to pull out in a single tug. To the extent that there is an easy correspondence between two cultures that marginalise women, it becomes even harder to discuss the biblical texts that reaffirm women's marginality.

Furthermore, it is a well known fact that, throughout history, this correspondence of two patriarchal sexist societies has resulted in their mutual consolidation. On the one hand, old time anti-women customs of Hebrew culture have been declared sacred: on the other hand, certain texts have consequently been held up as biblical principles to prove that women's marginalisation is natural in daily life. It is in this sense that the Hebrew-Jewish lifestyle presented by the Bible is perpetuated precisely because "thus says the word of God" (Isaiah 1:8). This explains why the Bible has been used to reinforce the position of inferiority in which the society and culture have placed women for centuries. Today

this attitude is not so apparent as in the past, but in some churches it still manifests itself, albeit in disguise.

Something different takes place in grassroots Christian communities. They react in different ways to difficult biblical texts. Sometimes they disregard anti-women texts. At other times they juggle them to come out with a positive side or they soften the oppressive nature of the content (Tamez 1994:193). On still other occasions they wisely simplify the problem by stating that those were other times, that reality should be different today, that God is a God of life and therefore God cannot favour discrimination against women.

Having experienced all of these attitudes in the context of different religious communities, I have never previously taken this problem seriously. In truth, the problem would not be serious if everybody considered the Bible for what it really is: a testimony of a Judeo-Christian people with a particular culture, for whom holy revelation works always in favour of those who have least. Women would then feel included among the oppressed and they would contextualise those texts that segregate them.

However, I have come to believe that the problem is more serious than I had thought at first. Its seriousness comes, first, from the effects that these anti-women biblical readings have produced on so many women and men who have internalised as sacred natural law, the inferiority of women; secondly, there is an inherent difficulty in interpreting texts that not only legitimate, but also legislate, the marginalisation of women; thirdly, and this is mainly for Protestants, the problem is the principle of biblical authority as it is traditionally perceived.

5.4 WOMANIST/FEMINIST DIALOGUE IN HERMENEUTICS

5.4.1 Background

The starting point in womanist hermeneutics is the assumption that the Bible is a male story populated by human males, divine males, divine male emissaries and human women mostly servicing male goals, whether social, political, cultural or religious. For Delores Williams this is the matter of seriousness. When they probe the Bible for meanings which are relevant to African-American women's experience and faith, they must engage a hermeneutical posture of suspicion, just as their feminist sisters do. Their main aim must be to articulate another truth. They must bear in mind that they have the cultural heritage of a slave. This cultural heritage, patterned by biblical motifs, is the context of the early Christian origins of African Americans. It was this cultural heritage and its biblical patterning that transmitted to slaves the hope for liberation and the belief that God's power sustained their survival struggle. This slave way of using the Bible must be affirmed. Thus the womanist also engages a hermeneutical posture of affirmation as she attempts to discern both the Bible's message to black women and the meaning for black women of the Biblically derived black cultural patterns.

African-American slaves, female and male, created an oral text from a written text (the king James version of the Bible). They composed this oral text by extracting from the Bible or adding to biblical content those phrases, stories, biblical personalities and moral prescriptions relevant to the character of their life situation and pertinent to the aspirations of the slave community. They took from the Bible those things that assured them that they were under God's care, that God would eventually bring justice to their cause because God had the whole world in His hand. This oral text was passed along from generation to generation of black people in songs, tales, rhymes, stories and sermons. Its content was a curious mixture of female-inclusive statements and androcentric faith-claims. Thus the oral text could speak of God as mother, father, sister

and brother while it is simultaneously claimed that He has the whole world in His hands. For example, "My God he is able, or My God don't come when you want Him but He always comes on time" (Williams 1993:188).

Womanist sociologist of religion, Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, illustrates slaves structuring this oral text when she shows how they argumented a fragment from Psalm 68 (God as "father to the fatherless") with God as mother to the motherless. As lines in a spiritual song, these "fatherless ... motherless" phrases were also united by the slaves with phrases about God being "sister to the sisterless", and "brother to the brotherless". In this way, Gilkes says black people created an Afrocentric biblical tradition.

Gilkes claims that what she refers to as the Afrocentric usage of this Psalm (adding female meaning to the Psalm), points to the importance of gender. There is also another way to account for what this tradition pointed to. These additional fragments emphasised the importance of family and reaffirmed African-American kinship ties, which the institution of slavery had broken at will. This addition of mothers, brothers, sisters proclaimed that there was power in family and kinship because God took the place of whoever was missing from the relation. God provided the function the missing person would have provided, such as nurture (mother to the motherless, father to the fatherless, and peer relationships (sister to the sisterless, brother to the brotherless). Even though kinship ties were torn asunder by the slavocracy, God restored the function.

However, Gilkes is correct in asserting that this African-American way of extracting material from the biblical canon and shaping it to fit into a black life context represented a technique of fashioning a biblical tradition relevant to the black condition. She shows that the strategy has continued to the present and that this Afrocentric biblical tradition was fundamental for the creation of African-American culture. Some of this language is, as Gilkes claims, female inclusive.

Africans in Africa also prayerfully recognise the motherliness of God in Christ through Jesus' lament, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wigs, and ye would not!" (Williams 1993:189). It is not unreasonable to assume that the Africans in the New World grasped its importance also. It is quite possible that the spiritual Rocking Jerusalem reflects imaginatively on this text and indirectly links the discipleship of Mary and Martha to the role of God the mother in Jesus, an interesting argument for the necessity of women's ordination to the priesthood.

Apparently womanist scholars must be very critical of this Afrocentric biblical tradition. We must ask if African Americans created an oral text that functioned socially and politically in opposing ways, that is, it granted mothers (not all women) power but denied all women authority. Did our African heritage, our American heritage and our African-American strategies for establishing a black biblical tradition together create a split-consciousness granting power to mothers but investing all the authority in males? We must ask: Is this emphatic association of God with the mother role oppressive to those black women who are not mothers and cannot be or do not choose to be?

Delores S Williams concludes that the egalitarian strain has to do with the interpretative principles (hermeneutics) the folks used in their interpretation of the Bible, and that these interpretative principles derived from their life situation and community aspirations.

Deposits of African-American culture suggest that liberation and survival were vital issues in slave consciousness. Thus the slave's questions with regard to Scripture were: What has God to say and do about our community's survival? Put simplistically, Williams' womanist claim is that, for the slaves, Moses and Jesus (and God's action through them) were the answer to the former question, and Hagar and Ishmael (and God's response to them) were the way the slaves answered the latter question. While we cannot

romanticise it, we cannot forget the influence that African heritage must have exerted upon the African slave's interpretation of both the Bible and the new culture (American, white) into which the slave was thrown with no preparation whatsoever. We can speculate that it was altogether consistent with some African consciousness for African slaves in America to appropriate a female and her child (Hagar and Ishmael) in relation to survival. This is because some of the slaves came from matrilineal cultures where survival and progeny were concealed through the female.

Of course, Hagar's and Ishmael's life-situation was like that of black female slaves and their children. Like Hagar, they experienced harsh treatment from slave mistresses. Slave women were raped by slave masters. Slave masters fathered children by slave women, and then often disclaimed and sold them away to other plantations. Like Hagar and Ishmael when they were finally freed from the house of bondage, African-American enslaves were faced with making a way out of no way. They were thrown out into the world with no economic resources. The issue for Hagar and Ishmael and for the newly freed African-American slaves was quality of life. The question was, and still is today, how can oppressed people develop a positive and productive quality of life in a situation where the resources for doing so are lacking?

Black liberation theology is providing the theological explication of the liberation principle of black biblical interpretation. Womanist/survivalists/quality of life theology (at least in this research) is beginning to provide the theological explication of the survival principle of African-American biblical interpretation. When our hermeneutical principle is God's word of survival and quality of life to oppressed communities (or families) living in a diaspora, Williams is of the opinion that we put different emphasis upon biblical text and identify with different biblical stories than do black liberation theologians.

However, some womanist theologians are more committed to the liberation hermeneutics. While other womanist theologians may be more committed to the survival/quality of life hermeneutic, though both groups would perhaps agree that these two hermeneutical principles should be employed simultaneously in the interpretation of biblical texts, they obviously need to engage in dialogue. The subject of their conversation might be the different images of God issuing from the application of the two hermeneutical principles and the different responsibility (in the survival modality) put upon the community for the formation of a positive, productive quality of life. It could be well be that some Hispanic feminist theologians and some Jewish feminist theologians, who understand survival to be a primary issue in their communities, might also join this dialogue.

In the survival modality God's word is not always compatible with what feminist and womanist liberationists might want to hear. For example, the story of the Babylonian captivity is useful for black American descendants of slaves trying to survive in economic captivity in North America. Parts of this story tell people how to survive bondage and how to secure their quality of life. In Jeremiah, God's word to Jews (who are free) is that some of them will be taken to captivity in Babylon. Then, when they are in exile in Babylon, Jeremiah sends a letter containing God's word to the exiles. This word is a female-male inclusive "survival and quality of life" word. In Jeremiah 29:4-7 God, having promised survival to the exiled Jews, sends these commands to the captives:

> Build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters, take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters, multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

While extensive womanist exegesis is required to gain in-depth meaning here, some surface remarks can be made about this text. We can respond to the question of how the

womanist survival/quality-of-life hermeneutic initially interprets the text. First of all, community responsibility is commanded in the work of survival of the group. Whereas the promises of the survival of the progenies of Abram and Hagar were the responsibility of the God whom they knew (or who knew them), these exiles in Jeremiah apparently have the choice of multiplying or decreasing. Oppressed black Americans, female and male, will understand this text to be advice about how to oppose the genocide they experience from time to time in America. Sons and daughters are to be involved in this work of guarding against and opposing genocide. Both sons and daughters are to be involved in and produced by this group's reproduction history. In addition to the production of humans, this reproduction history includes an economic dimension in building houses (producing homes for themselves) and planting gardens (producing food for themselves).

Then there is God's advice that black Americans might not want to Hera: "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare". In other words, seek the welfare of your oppressors. African Americans in the diaspora can perhaps hear the silence in the text reiterate what their experience in America has taught: When the white-controlled power structures and ordinary white people are prospering, then black people are at least not brutalised as badly. When the white controlled power structures and ordinary white people are suffering economically and when the white population decreases, black people are brutalised and scapegoated in every possible way while oppressed people live in territories controlled by their oppressors, the welfare of the oppressed is tied into the welfare of oppressors. Therefore, black people may hear this text suggesting that the oppressed should become engaged in politics and prayers as a way of seeking the welfare of the city, as well as their own welfare.

But what womanist survival/quality-of-life hermeneutics cannot forget about this exile of Jews told in the book of Jeremiah is God's promise that one day they will be fee to

return to their country. When they did return they were, like the newly freed African-American slaves and like Hagar and Ishmael, faced with the issue of survival without proper economic resources. Not only God, but also the community must work on behalf of its survival and the formation of its own quality of life. The womanist survival/quality-of-life hermeneutic means to communicate this to black Christians. Liberation is an ultimate goal, but in the mean-time survival and prosperity must be the experience of our people, and God has had and continues to have a word to say about the survival and quality of life of the descendants of African female slaves.

5.4.2 Womanist Hermeneutics

The particular history and context of African-American women and the lack of awareness among early feminists as to their own class and race biases, compelled African-American women to forge their own hermeneutical approach. A history of slavery, racism, dislocation and struggle for liberation shapes this approach. Womanist hermeneutics is, like feminist hermeneutics, not a monolithic exercise, but is characterised by certain features which are singular. Among these is first the reliance on the work of African-American women writers, for example Alice Walker, and second African-American women's experience of community in the black Church (Maimela and König 1998:354).

The literary tradition of African-American writers are very important for womanist biblical scholars and theologians because they are the recorders of the black experience who convey the black community's consciousness of values which enables them to find meaning in spite of social degradation, economic exploitation and political oppression (Canon 1988:78). These writings are embraced for their fidelity in communicating the baffling complexities and the irreducible contradictions of the black experience in America (Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion 1993:30). In order to find a deep innate understanding of the social, cultural and political environment in which black people live, womanist theologians turn to this literary tradition.

In particular African-Americans have had to grapple with their history of slavery and its consequences for their lives right up to the present time. This history of slavery is a recurring theme in the work of the women writers who play such an important role in womanist hermeneutics. What does it mean for the faith experience of black people to have had slavery practised and condoned by whites who called themselves Christians? In reflecting on this question, Cannon identifies three distorted perceptions which made it possible for white Christians to condone slavery:

> As property, slaves were not seen as fully human, as Africans they were classified as heathen savages to be saved through enslavement, and as Christians, white and black, they were expected to believe that slavery was divinely willed in the Bible (Fiorenza 1994:6).

Sojourner Truth, a freed slave summed up her hermeneutic by referring to the white minister's use of texts from Paul's writings in which slaves are enjoined to be obedient to their masters and saying: "I promised my maker that if I ever learned to read and if freedom ever came, I would not read that part of the Bible" (Thurman 1949:32). Within this harrowing history, African-Americans seeks liberating themes in the Bible and find encouragement to resist racist discrimination and to celebrate their worth and dignity.

Affirming the God who has a special interest in and care for the oppressed and marginalised characterises all liberation theologies. Working in this tradition, womanist theologian Delores Williams recounts making a starting discovery. She finds two traditions for interpreting the Bible in the black community. The first is a Black Liberation Hermeneutic which claims God as the liberator of the poor and oppressed. This she calls "the liberation tradition of African American biblical appropriation" (Williams 1993:2). The second tradition, which Williams herself embraces, is the one that lays emphasis on female rather than male activity, thus female-centred hermeneutic. She calls "survival/quality-of-life tradition of African-American biblical appropriation" (Williams 1993:6). She finds a biblical prototype for African-American women's

experience in the figure of Hagar, the slave woman who was cast into the desert by Abraham and Sarah. Williams writes:

> In black consciousness, God's response of survival and quality of life to Hagar is God's response of survival and quality of life to African-American women and mothers of slave descent struggling to sustain their families with God's help (1993:6).

What exactly is the "black church" which plays such an important role in the faith and actions of African-American women? To begin with, the "black church" was for a long time the sole place where black people were in control. As such, it was the heart, the centre and basic organisation of black life (Russel 1985:34). Today, according to Williams, "The black church does not exist as an institution. It is not confined to one place. For some it is invisible, rooted in the soul of the community memory of black folk. For others, it is the core symbol of four hundred years of struggle by African-American people against white oppression in which God is involved on their side. And, for yet others, it is the place where black people come to worship without white people being present. Despite these differences, Williams writes:

> But we know it when we see oppressed people rising up in freedom. It is the heart of hope in the black community's experience of oppression, survival struggle and its historic efforts toward complete liberation (1993:204).

Williams distinguishes between this invisible black church rooted in the soul of the black people and the visible African-American denominational churches which she finds guilty of sexism and poor leadership (Williams 1993:206-209).

According to Cannon (Williams 1993:204) the role of the black church in biblical interpretation during the time of slavery served as a two-pronged weapon. On the one hand, confidence that the omnipotent power of God is with them, comforted the slaves

and helped them to survive this oppressive system. On the other hand, it also made them discontented with their condition. Black women, despite particularly noxious exploition by their white masters, shaped their specific resistance and survival through their religious consciousness nurtured in this dual reality. After the abolition of slavery, black women continued to struggle against racist socio-political and economic structures. In Cannon's words: "The Black woman began her life of freedom with no vote, no protection, and no equity of any sort" (Russel 1985:35). Throughout their history, the Black church has played a vital role in developing biblical teachings which resonate with the socio-economic and political experience of black women and men. In this endeavour, the experience of black women and their understanding of who Jesus is for them forms a powerful impetus for liberation. Cannon explains that the "Black womanist identifies with those biblical characters who hold on to life in the face of formidable oppression. They search the Scriptures to learn how to dispel the threat of death in order to seize the present life" (Russel 1985:40). The prophetic and liberating tradition in the Bible remains the central authority for womanist theologians as it does for most liberation theologies. This tradition is interpreted in the light of the black contextual experience in all its diversity, as articulated by the African-American literary tradition and the life of community in the black churches (Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, 1992:136). When women interpret the Bible, they do so from specific historical and social context.

5.5 CHRIST FOR AFRICAN WOMEN

5.5.1 Introduction

Christology is a familiar word among Christian theologians and one that is quite able to stand by itself and be explicated as a theological issue and concept. The curiosity that arises, if any, will be in relation to the world 'women' and the conjunction 'and'. The importance of the conjunction is to mu mind that of a question, which could be stated in various ways: What have women to do with the concept of Christology? What do women

say about Christology? Is there such a thing as a women's Christology? Do the traditional statements of Christology take into account women's experience of life? What we shall do here is to share some thoughts on the Chris from the perspective of African women based on the approach of Mercy Amba Oduyoue and Elizabeth Amoab.

To do this, however, it is undoubtedly useful and interesting to begin with what African men say about Christ, since they have dominated the field of written theology. This will necessitate taking a short look at Scriptures and church history, alongside African Christianity and traditional religions, before coming to what the women of Africa wish to say about Christ.

5.5.2 The Christ of Scripture and Traditions

Most Christians refer to Scripture as meaning the Hebrew Bible and its Christian supplement, the New Testament, but I would like to highlight by referring to the "unwritten Scripture" of the Fante of Ghana, as a starting point of Amoab and Oduyoye (1998:35-38). When the Fante were journeying to their present home in Southern Ghana, they crossed vast tracts of waterless plains and they thirsted. Such was the agony of a people on the move. Their leader, who was a woman Eku the Matriarch, did not lose courage. She spurred them on. They were to press forward until they came to a place where they could settle in peace and prosperity.

Following her encouragement, they dragged their weakened legs along. They then came to a pool of water. Having suffered much treachery on their journey, none dared to salve the parched throat with the water now presented invitingly before them. It could have been poisoned by their enemies, Matriarch Eku took her life into her hands, drank from the pool, and gave to her dog to drink. The people waited. They peered at the woman and her dog with glazed eyes. Neither human nor animal had suffered from drinking the water from the pool. All fell to and drank their fill, shouting "Eku aso" (Eku has tasted)

(Oduyoye 1988:36). And so the place where this happened is to this day called Ekuaso. Eku has tasted on our behalf, we can now drink without fear of death.

All human communities have their stories of persons whose individual acts have had lasting effects on the destiny and ethos of the whole group. Such are the people remembered in stories. Not all are Christ-figures; only those whose presence has led to more life and wholesome relations are commemorated as having been 'God-sent'. In the Hebrew story, the idea of the 'God-sent' figure crystallised into that of the Messiah, the anointed of God. The Messiah was expected to be a male figure of power, as a ruler of God's people and a prophet called by God to guide the people. Much else accrued to the figure of the Messiah as the lot of the people passed through political changes. One such metamorphosis taken over by Christians is the Messiah as the Suffering Servant of God. But even cast in this lowly mould, the figure of the Messiah remains powerful and victorious and male. Messiah is a servant who suffers but one whose presence always tells the people how God's future for humanity stands inviolate in spite of all appearances. As with Jesus of Nazareth, most people who fell into his way of life and thinking were Jews, they had been brought up on the various images of the messianic figure and had prayed for the timely arrival of the anointed one of God, who was being expected by the whole nation.

We are not aware of the concept of the expected one in African Mythology. However, deliverers abound; some are memorialised in legends, but they are not always male, (Oduyoye 1988:36). The folk etymology of the name of the village of Ekuaso illustrates this. There have also been instances of "innocent" persons, women as well as men, who were being sacrificed to bring peace and prosperity to communities. In the Bapedi tribes who have rain making ceremonies, we have such an idea where one of the men who would go out on the mountain to look for a prescribed animal for rain ceremony would slaughter one of the people in the group as a sacrifice (kgokong entsho) a black buck. Even in the same tribes there is also an idea of the expected one from gods. This is seen

especially where the chief would die before marrying the lantern wife to beget a new chief (kgoshi). The wife would be married later and there will bee a long waited period for the coming of a new chief (kgoshi) who would be the deliverer of the tribe.

There are also instances of persons who are made scapegoats and who suffer the fate of "the goat of Azazel" in the Hebrew atonement ceremonies (Oduyoye 1988:36). They are banished from their communities, carrying the sins of the whole people so that the community may live more fully in the coming years. But the myth of a future Utopia to be ushered in by "One who is to Come" is a rare one among Africans. African myths tell of a past of perfection in primeval times, not of a future of plenty and bliss. The individual, however, lives in hope, almost immediate tomorrow that those who are alive now may hope to see is the immediate concern of prayer in the traditional religion.

The Christian religion raised in Africa the hope of a future when all things would be righted and be "fixed up" in Christ. Classical Christologies that have been taught in Africa include that of the Christ enthroned in glory, who, as a magnanimous potentate, oversees all and orders all according to the will of God. The imagery is that of Luke's Jesus of Nazareth, whose central concern was the kingdom of God. The royal Christ fitted into the colonial ambiance of the propagation of Christianity as well as the missionary's self-image of a benevolent paternal figure who knows what is best for African converts. The need for a conqueror to overcome the evil forces that cross the way of the African was brushed aside as superstitious fear. "The Classical Western Christologies have been appropriated by the Western Churches in Africa, which are faithfully carrying on the legacy of the Western missions" (Oduyoye 1988:37). "Jesus is Lord" remains the keynote of this Christology - "Lord" in terms of a benevolent ruler.

Christ has also been preached in terms of the one who is sacrificed to wipe away inauspiciousness and free us for a new beginning. The eschatology that accompanies this Christology has, however, focussed almost entirely on "the end of the age" and often on

a supramundane realm where all is well. African Christians have had to support these Christ-centred spiritualities from their own traditions, which assure them of immediate well-being in the now and in the near future. The inadequacy of the received Christology with its emphasis on the end of the age is part of the reason for the rapid growth of the African Charismatic churches that offer a *Christus Victor*.

The predominant myth of Christianity in Africa, however, remains the paradise to come: the Messianic hope of a golden age has even begun to surface in political terms as "African unity". In the church, it is stated in terms of a single unified church. As these ideals retreat or, rather, tarry long, people either by deeper into the apocalypticism of the "coming one", and therefore of Christ the king who sits in judgment of this subjects to reward faithful Christians with bliss and unbelievers with torments, or they simply give up. Oduyoye suggests that "this Christology is not up to the task of empowering Christians for life in Africa today, with its material and spiritual demands" (Oduyoye 1988:37). Oduyoye sees it as masking the relevance of Christ in the business of living today and in the immediate future.

For womanists Africans require a holistic view of life. The main contribution of Oduyoye is that "this demands a Christ who affects the whole of life and demonstrates that there is nothing that is not the business of God" (Oduyoye 1938:37). The need to rewrap Christology in African leaves may be illustrated by questions that African students often raise concerning sacrifice. We read in the Old Testament that God does not approve of human sacrifice, so why does God use the cross as the means of salvation, they ask. If Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ-figure, represents "the right and good way of being human", what does that say to human suffering and especially voluntary acceptance of limiting conditions. What are the implications of the Christian affirmation that the anointed one of God, the Christ-figure, is anointed of God to bring victory over all the powers that seek to alienate us from this road to true humanity? Are there other Christ-figures apart from Jesus of Nazareth? Johanine Christology has established a firm

principle that there is no other name. If this is so, then the One Name ought to cope efficiently with the whole life of the whole people, all the "people that on earth do dwell", and therefore all of Africa and the life of all who live in Africa as Africans and not as changed into anything else. Oduyoye emphasises that the whole business of the whole of Africa is God's business and therefore demands a Christology that explicates how that business is Christ's business.

African Business

In this subject Amoab and Aduyoye's starting point is the belief that in Africa the devil is a reality. They maintain that witches actually operate to release life denying forces into the world. Individual people may be possessed and used by negative forces to prevent life-affirming and life-giving environments and activities. "Evil is real, and evil is embodied in persons as well as unleashed on people by spiritual forces (Oduyoye 1988:38). Further, the spirit world is a powerful reality in Africa. God created not only the palpable world but living spirits whom we do not see but whose presence we actually feel and who, we believe, definitely impinge on our lives for good. These women say that these spirits are the servants of God, a sort of intricate administrative and executive service managing God's business in God's *Oikos* (house) (Oduyoye 1988:38). Such a cosmology calls for a Christology that consciously deals with the relation of Christ to God, the relation of Christ to the spirit world, and how the Christ, in the context of the belief in spirits, stands in relation to Africans in their dependance on God. Is the Christ the "chief executive", giving us confidence that, however, precarious our circumstances, all is in fact under control?

The theology of the people sees the Christ in this role. The Christ of the theology of the people is the Christ who breaks the power of evil and empowers us in our life's journey. In Africa, where one's forebears retains an ongoing interest in one's affairs and continue to be involved long after they have departed to join their forebears, precedence has a

strong hold on the regulation of ethical life. These women ask whether Jesus is our ancestor, the quintessence of a life of faith. If so, they maintain then one begins to formulate Christology in terms of mediation and of participation in the divine human axis that links humanity to divinity (Oduyoye 1988:39). In Jesus of Nazareth we see the return to earth of the Divine Spirit of God, the source of life, as an individual just as in African tradition the ancestors return in the birth of new babies. This would, of course, imply that there can be many Christs as the spirit of a grandmother returns to grandchildren in perpetuity as long as such children are named after her, that is, called by her name.

In Africa, where physical suffering seems endemic, where hunger and thirst are the continuous experience of millions, a suffering Christ becomes an attractive figure. However, Jesus of Nazareth is seen more as a comrade who did not accept deprivation as the destiny of humanity but rather, demonstrated in his dealings with people that such suffering is not in the plan of God. You cannot be sad when Jesus is around; you cannot fast. Healing and eating and drinking were the experiences of those who were with him, and when they told their story they did not neglect to say so. In fact, they assigned large portions of their stories to the telling of these experiences. They were as impressed by these as by his death and resurrection. They did not report only what Jesus said, for they saw what he taught as made up of both what he did and what he said. His presence saved situations. This is another one of the reasons for the growth of African Charismatic churches, whose prophets and healers are seen as mirroring the Christ. Jesus Christ in his life enhanced life where it had been overshadowed by death, even bringing life where physical death had arrived prematurely. Christ, the great Healer, is seen as the centre of the Christology of these charismatic churches. This is another reason why in Africa the Good Friday which is the reminder and celebration of the sufferings of Jesus is still and highly respected and obeyed. In it the Africans can see themselves and they can relate their sufferings to the suffering of Jesus and see in him a partner and co-sufferer.

The Christ who is on the side of life is seen as being on the side of God. He not only taught that laws which frustrate and stifle life are to be scrapped: he himself healed on the Sabbath and defended his disciples against the scruples of religious legalism. Even his acceptance of death can be read as the outcome of love for life, since the will of God can only foster life, even if the path has to be through death. Africa's business has to be that of turning death into life.

Though, in general, the women affirm the Christological position of the African men, at times they go beyond it or contradict it altogether. This can be gleaned not so much from the writings of African women as from the way they live and from their Christianity, their very spirituality, their witness to what Christ means in their lives.

The Christ whom African women worship, honour, and depend on is the victorious Christ, knowing that evil is a reality. Death and life-denying forces are the experience of women, and so Christ, who countered these forces and who gave back her child to the widow of Nain, is the African woman's Christ.

This Christ is the liberator from the burden of disease and the ostracism from a society riddled with blood-taboos and theories of inauspiciousness arising out of women's blood. Christ liberated women by being born of Mary, demanding that the woman bent double with gynecological disorders should stand up straight. The practice of making women become silent "beasts" of societies burdens, bent double under racism, poverty, and lack of appreciation of what fullness of womanhood should be, has been annulled and countered by Christ. Christ transcends and transforms culture and has liberated us to do the same.

Jesus of Nazareth, by counter-cultural relations which he established with women, has become for women the Christ, the anointed one who liberates, the companion, friend,

teacher, and true child of women because in Christ the fullness of all that we know of perfect womanhood is revealed (Oduyoye 1988:44).

He is the caring, compassionate nurture of all. Jesus nurtures not just by parables but by miracles of feeding. With his own hands he cooked that others might eat, he was known in the breaking of the bread. Jesus is Christ, truly woman (human) yet truly divine, for only God is the truly compassionate one.

Christ for women is the Jesus of Nazareth, the Servant who washed the disciples' feet, the Good Shepherd who leads men and women only to "green pastures", to the kingdom of God, who in fact comes after women to draw them back to God. Christ seeks to save. Jesus Christ is Lord because Jesus of Nazareth was a servant, meeting the needs of humanity in obedience to the will of God even to the point of dying that we might be freed from the fear of physical death.

The Christ for women is the Jesus of Nazareth who agreed to be God's Sacrificial Lamb, thus teaching that true and living sacrifice is that which is freely and consciously made, and who pointed to the example of the widow who gave all she had in respond to God's love. Christ is the Jesus of Nazareth who approved of the costly sacrifice of the woman with the expensive oil, who anointed him (king) prophet, priest in preparation for his burial, thereby also approving all that is noble, lovely, loving and motivated by love and gratitude.

Jesus of Nazareth, designated 'the Christ', is the one who has broken down the barriers we have erected between God and us as well as among us. The Christ is the reconciler, calling us back to our true selves, to one another and to God, thereby saving us from isolation, which is the lack of community that is the real experience of death. In Christ all things hold together. The integrity of the woman (a person) as born into a particular culture, and yet belonging to the community of Christ believers, is ensured. The integrity

of the woman (a person) as body/soul is ensured, recognised, and promoted by the way Jesus of Nazareth lived and interacted with women and with persons handicapped by death-dealing cultural demands and by physical and material needs. The Christ has held body/soul together by denouncing oppressive religious practices that ignored well-being. It is this Christ who has become for us, for African women and for Africa, the saviour and liberator of the world. This Christ dominates the spiritual churches of Africa. The women give expression to a spirituality that enables them to face human struggles and problems. In fact, women have founded some of the African spiritual churches and within them exercise their spiritual gifts of healing, solving marital problems, and so forth. God wears a human face in Christ. God in Christ suffers with women of Africa.

The picture and image of Jesus Christ from the womanist perspective can be more clearly seen when we have a look into the Asian womens' Christology: The most prevailing image of Jesus among Asian women's theological expressions is the image of the suffering servant. Asian Christian women seem to feel most comfortable with this image of Jesus whether they are theologically conservative or progressive.

According to the "Summary Statement from the Theological Study Group of Christology", developed by the Asian Women's Theological Conference, Singapore 1987, Asian Christian women from many different countries defined Jesus as "the prophetic Messiah whose role is that of the suffering servant"; the one who "offers himself as ransom for many" (Chung 1990). They claimed that through his suffering Messiahship, he creates a new humanity.

Asian Christian women at the Singapore conference rejected such images of Jesus as "triumphal king" and "authoritative high priest" (Chung 1990:53). They contended that these images of Jesus have served to support a patriarchal religious consciousness in the church and in theology. Jesus, according to this conference, became the Messiah through his suffering in service to others, not by his domination.

The form that womanist Christology has taken in Latin America has been the key that the liberation approach has used throughout its study of the Gospels - an analysis of Jesus' egalitarian behaviour as revealed by his encounters and relations with women. One of the clearest ways in which Jesus broke with tradition has to do with women. His behaviour towards the women who had been marginalised by Jewish society was not only new, but even shocking, and surprising even his own disciples (John 4:27). Women were singled out as beneficiaries of his miracles (Luke 8:2; Mark 2:29-31; 5:25-34; 7:24-30) and leading recipients of the Good News he brought. For example, in the resurrection story, women were the first group to know and to be sent to proclaim the resurrection gospel into the city.

Out of their participation in the suffering of our people, while also battling through their own struggle, women discover a new image of Jesus a Jesus who is brother and sister, in solidarity on the journey toward liberation, the people's journey, and their own journey; a Jesus who is a colleague, fellow revolutionary in building the new society (King 1994:322).

Jesus' face is present in all the men and women who endure weariness and give their life for others. Jesus is identified as God, man and woman, standing in firm solidarity with the struggle. This is a God who is sensitive to suffering, a God who goes along with the people incarnate in history; a God who is on a pilgrimage with the people, who is identified with the cause of justice. A discovery of this kind of a God is a discovery that gives meaning to our struggle and makes everyday life bearable in the midst of oppression and unceasing threats.

Like Jesus' suffering, women's active suffering has salvivic value (Fabella 1988:111). For from the perspective of faith, every suffering, whether personally or vicariously experienced for the sake of building a more just world, falls within the ambit of salvation history. This historical salvific process culminated in the coming of Jesus Christ to

inaugurate God's reign. All suffering, all hoping, all struggle ultimately find meaning from the viewpoint of the reign of God that Jesus proclaimed. The assurance that God's reign will come in its fullness is Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, the anchor of hope (Heb 6:19). Christ today in Asia is going simultaneously through his agony, being crucified, and alive in the struggle of women from their captivity toward full humanity in a just, egalitarian society.

Conclusion

An African woman perceives and accepts Christ as a woman and as an African (Oduyoye 1988:44). The commitment that flows from this faith is commitment to full womanhood (humanity), to the survival of human communities, to the birthing, nurturing, and maintenance of life, and to loving relations and a life that is motivated by love.

Having accepted Christ as refugee and guest of Africa, the woman seeks to make Christ at home and to order life in such a way as to enable the whole household to feel at home with Christ. The woman sees the whole space of Africa as a realm to be ordered, as a place where Christ has truly "tabernacled". Fears are not sweep under the bed and mats but are brought out to be dealt with by the presence of the Christ. Christ becomes truly friend and companion, liberating women from assumptions of patriarchal societies, and honouring, accepting, and sanctifying the single life as well as the married life, parenthood as well as the absence of progeny. The Christ of the women of Africa upholds not only motherhood, but all who, like Jesus of Nazareth, perform "mothering" roles of bringing out the best in all around them. This is the Christ, high priest, advocate, and just judge in whose kingdom we pray to be.

This has serious consequences, for Jesus of Nazareth has pointed out the Christ-figures among women. Whatever they do or do not do to the least of these figures, they are

assured that they are relating to the Christ through their interaction with, or avoidance of, such people by the contribution they make to the oppression they live.

Finally, the only way they can convince Africa that Jesus of Nazareth is uniquely the Christ of God is to live the life they are expected to live as Christ believers. Do not call "Lord, Lord" while ignoring the demands of God.

Christology down the ages, though derived from the experiences of the early companion of Jesus of Nazareth and those of their immediate associates, has been formulated in response to the actual historical realities of each age and place. Persons have contributed by the way each perceives and experiences 'Christ'. Christ has been explained through imagery, cosmology, and historical events understood by both 'speakers' and 'listeners'. This process continues in Africa. One thing is certain: whatever the age or place, the most articulate Christology is that silently performed in the drama of everyday living.

5.6 WOMANISM IN THE MINISTRY OF JESUS

In the experiences of black people, Jesus was "all things". Chief among these however, was the belief in Jesus as the divine co-suffer, who empowers them in situations of oppression. For black Christian women in the past, Jesus was their central frame of reference. They identified with Jesus because they believed that Jesus identified with them. As Jesus was persecuted and made to suffer undeservedly, so were they. His suffering culminated in the crucifixion. Their crucifixion included rape, and babies being sold, but Jesus' suffering was not the suffering of a mere human, for Jesus was understood to be God incarnate. As Harold Carter observed of black prayers in general, there was no difference made between the persons of trinity, Jesus, God, or the Holy Spirit. All of these proper names for God were used interchangeably in prayer language. Thus, Jesus was the one who speaks the world into creation. He was the power behind the church. Black women's affirmation of Jesus as God meant that white people were not

God. One old slave woman clearly demonstrated this as she prayed: "Dear Massa Jesus, we all unsbeg O onedr (you) come make us a call dis yere day. We is nutting but poor Ethiopian women and people ain't tink much bout we. We ain't trust any of dem great high people for come to we church, but do you is de one great Massa, great too much dan Massa Linkum you ain't shame to care for we African people (Grant 1989:213).

This slave woman did not hesitate to identify her struggles and pain with those of Jesus. In actual fact, the common struggle made her know that Jesus would respond to her beck and call. As she is truly among the people at the bottom of humanity, she can make things comfortable for Jesus even though she may have nothing to give him no water, no food, but she can give tears and love. She continues: "Come to we, dear Massa Jesus. We all uns ain't got no good cool water for give you when you thirsty. You know, Massa, de drought so long, and the well so low, ain't nutting but mud to drink. But we gwine to take de munion cup and fill it wid de tear of repentance, and love clean out of we heart. Dat all we hab to gib you, good Mass" (Grant 1989:213).

For black women, the role of Jesus unravelled as they encountered him in their experience as one who empowers the weak. In this vein, Jesus was such a central part of Sojourner Truth's life that all of her sermons made him the starting point. When asked by a preacher if the source of her preaching was the Bible, she responded: "No honey, can't preach from de Bible - can't read a letter" (Grant 1984:214). Then she explained, "When I preached, I has jest one text to preach from, an I always preaches from this one. My text is, 'when I found Jesus' (Grant 1989:214). In this sermon Sojourner Truth recounts the events and struggles of her life from the time her parents were brought from Africa and sold "up and down, an hither an yon" to the time that she met Jesus within the context of her struggles for dignity of black people and women. Her encounter with Jesus brought such joy that she became overwhelmed with love and praise. "Praise, praise, praise to the Lord! An I begun to feel such a love in my soul as I never felt before - love to all creatures. An then, all of a sudden, it stopped, an I said, Dar's de white folks that

have abused you, an beat you, an abused your people - think o them! But then there came another rush of love through my soul, an I cried out loud - loud" (Grant 1984:214).

This love was not a sentimental passive love. It was a tough, active love that empowered her to fight more fiercely for the freedom of her people. For the rest of her life she continued speaking at abolition and women's right gatherings, condemning the horrors of oppression.

5.7 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JESUS FOR THE WOMANIST TRADITION

More than anyone, black theologians have captured the essence of the significance of Jesus in the lives of black people which, to an extent includes black women. They all hold that the Jesus of history is important for understanding who he was and his significance for us today. By and large they have affirmed that this Jesus is the Christ, that is, God incarnate. They have argued that in the light of our experience, Jesus meant freedom. They have maintained that Jesus means freedom from sociopsycological, psycholcultural, economic and political oppression of black people. In other words, Jesus is a political Messiah. To free humans from bondage was Jesus' own definition of his ministry. This meant that as Jesus identified with the lowly of his day, he now identifies with the lowly of this day, who in the American context are black people. The identification is so real that Jesus Christ in fact becomes Black. It is important to note that Jesus' blackness is not a result of ideological distortion of a few black thinkers, but a result of careful Christological investigation. Cone examines the sources of Christology and concluded that Jesus was black because Jesus was a Jew. He explains: "It is on the basis of the soteriological meaning of the particularity of his Jewishness that theology must affirm the Christological significance of Jesus' present blackness. He is black because he was a Jew. The affirmation of the Black Christ can be understood when the significance of his past Jewishness is related dialectically to the significance of his present blackness.

On the one hand the Jewishness of Jesus located him in the context of the Exodus, thereby connecting his appearance in Palestine with God's liberation of oppressed Israelites from Egypt. Unless Jesus were truly from Jewish ancestry, it would make little theological sense to say that he is the fulfilment of God's covenant with Israel. On the other hand, the blackness of Jesus brings out the soteriological meaning of his Jewishness for our contemporary situation when Jesus' person is understood in the context of the cross and resurrection are Yahweh's fulfilment of his original intention fro Israel (Grant 1989:216).

The condition of Black people today reflects the cross of Jesus yet the resurrection brings the hope that liberation from oppression is imminent. The resurrected Black Christ signifies this hope.

5.7.1 Whom do you say God is?

Regardless of one's hopes about intentionality and womanist theological method, questions must be ask about the God-content of the theology. Walker's mention of the black womanist's love of the spirit is a true reflection of the great respect Afro-American women have always shown for the presence and work of the spirit (Williams 1987:70).

In the black church, women (and men) often judge the effectiveness of the worship service not on the scholarly content of the sermon nor on the ritual nor on orderly process. Rather, worship has been effective if 'the spirit was high', that is, if the spirit was actively and obviously present in a balanced blend of prayer, of cadenced word (the sermon), and of syncopated music ministering to the pain of the people.

The importance of this emphasis upon the spirit is that it allows Christian womanist theologians, in their use of the Bible, to identify and reflect upon those biblical stories in which poor oppressed women had a special encounter with divine emissaries of God, like

the spirit. In the Hebrew Testament, for example, Hagar's story is most illustrative and relevant to Afro-American women's experience of bondage, of African heritage, of encounter with God/emissary in the midst of fierce survival struggles. Kate Cannon among a number of black female preachers and ethicists urges black Christian women to regard themselves as Hagar's sisters (Williams 1987:70).

In relation to the Christian or New Testament, the Christian womanist theologian can re-focus the salvation story so that it emphasises the beginning of revelation with the spirit mounting. Mary, a woman of the poor: the Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee (Luke 1:35). Such an interpretation of revelation has roots in 19th century black abolitionist and feminist Sojourner Truth. Posing an important question and response, she refuted a white preacher's claim that women could not have rights equal to men's because Christ was not a woman. Truth asked, "Where did your Christ come from? ... From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him" (Williams 1987:71).

This idea suggest that womanist theology according to Williams could eventually speak of God in a well-developed theology of the spirit. The sources for this theology are many. For example, Harriet Tubman often "went into the spirit" before her liberation missions and claimed her strength for liberation activity came fro this way of meeting God (Williams 1987:71). So, I can say that womanist theology has grounds for shaping a theology of the spirit informed by black women's political action. For womanist theology, God is seen as spirit because it is from spiritual perspective that they encounter God and understand him as such, being supported by the Trinitarian understanding of God and God's action, that is, that it is the same God who act in the form of the spirit who is the creator.

Christian womanist responses to the question "who do you say God is?" Will be influenced by these many sources. Walker's way of connecting womanists with the spirit

is only one clue. The integrity of black church women's faith, their love of Jesus, their commitment to life, love, family, and politics will also yield vital clues. Williams in extension says that other theological voices (black liberation, feminist, Islamic, Asian, Hispanic, African, Jewish, and Western white male traditional) will provide insights relevant for the construction of the God-content of womanist theology.

Each womanist theologian will add her own special accent to the understandings of God emerging from womanist theology.

5.7.2 What Characterises the Way Black Women do Theology

I prefer to treat this subsection with special reference to African situation of women and I will base my discussion on the views of Rosemary Edet (Nigeria) and Bette Ekeya (Kenya).

The situation of women and the nature of Christianity in Africa are both shaped by the histories and cultures that are molding contemporary Africa. My contribution is primarily a descriptive one, sharing the context in which women try to live theologically in Africa. We begin with an overview of Africa's realities as shared by Nthamburi and Fanusie.

I am, of course, situation women's lives in the realities lived by all of Africa's people - women and men, since womanist theology is inclusive, and within which the Church operates. The Christian church has suffered and is still suffering from a growing cultural alienation because evangelisation of mission workers has not been that of cultural exchange but of cultural domination or assimilation, an idea felt by almost all black theologians and black traditional believers today. There has been an imposed model of development from European mother churches, accompanied by an ideological, cultural imposition, which has led to lifestyles that are both inconsistent and alienating for Africa's people (Edet & Ekeya, 1988:3). The result is a loss of cultural and material

identity. Periodic attempts are made by governments to inculcate nationalism into citizens. Unfortunately recitation of the national pledge of refraining from wearing miniskirts or minidresses does not turn one into a nationalist. Being a nationalist is an attitude and a commitment to the community that needs stronger roots than an enforced discipline. Nationhood may be imposed by colonial exigencies, but nationalism cannot be an imposed concept, it is a commitment.

As in colonisation, so it is with Christianisation: a cultural and religious alienation or lopsidedness has been introduced into Africa. One such experience is that brought about by evangelisation into male dominated church, bothy structurally and ministerially. This is not denying the elements of male domination in most African cultures. However, culturally there is no discrimination on the spiritual or religious level. Historically Christianity, which teaches that in Christ there is no male or female, Jew or Greek, turn around and sees to it that women are grouped with children in churches. Women are regarded as unfinished work of God and as such are like children.

The likeness of God in women is totally neglected and the neglect is justified by the biblical creation story.

According to Genesis 1:27, the bisexual androgynous human race as the image and likeness of the creator. God is the primary source of our understanding of this God. Both Genesis 1 and 2 indicate that when God shares God's being *ad extra* with that which is not God, the result is bisexual humanity. Thus, the one God of the Judeo-Christian tradition nevertheless exists so richly and fully that God's created image can only be pluriform, even sexually. In both Chapter 1 and 2 of Genesis there is unity and diversity in the human image and likeness of God, but neither domination nor subordination as I have indicated in the previous Chapter.

The literary form of Genesis 2 has been the occasion of many misinterpretations that have destroyed the partnership of man and woman as the image of God. All the members of the body work toward the betterment of the whole body. All are necessary and the dysfunction of one organ incapacitates the whole body. The present malaise in the church might be due to the fact that it has refused to allow women to function normally in the church but has reduced them to all purpose workers, for example, fund-raisers and rally organisers. The feminine image of God is therefore overshadowed and is not utilised by the church or by humanity in most cases. This is the situation that prompts the special attention we wish to call to women's lives in the midst of Africa's realities.

5.7.3 Africa's Realities

In an essay on the possibility of a new image for the African woman, Rosemary Nthamburi (1986:4) opens with the following statement:

> The African States have been through the traditional society, colonialism, and now have entered into a State of independence. As they experience these historical event and changes, African women labour under disabilities in employment, law, and sad to say, in church (Ntahmburi 1986:4)..

We know, of course, that contemporary Africa is at once traditional, colonial, and neocolonial. The countries are independent - almost all of them - but it is a fact that little is done independently of global politico-economics managed mostly by the nations of the Western hemisphere. Women share the bitter fruits of the exploitation of Africa by outsiders, but women's disabilities also have authentic roots in Africa's indigenous structures.

Africa's traditional society was by and large not as fair to women as we would like to think. Sometimes women were regarded as second-class citizens; often they were used

and handled like the personal property of men, exploited, oppressed, and degraded (Edet & Ekeya 1988:5). Under colonial rule women fared no better, for all the disabilities of Western Christian culture were added to the already burden some African situation. So it is no wonder that even when it has meant taking up arms, African women have fought as South African women fight today, to resist Western and racist exploitation of Africa. In spite of this involvement, the social status of women has not changed much, neither have stringent cultural provisions seen much modification in the direction of liberating women from dehumanisation.

When analysis women's contemporary experience, we cannot ignore the fact that in the realm of religion Africa has Christians, Muslims, and traditionalists moving side by side, influencing and validating one another's concepts - mostly in ways that are unfavourable to women. The expansionist move of the religions of the world and the spread of populations means that religious groups like the Bahai, Hindu, and Buddhists are present and active in Africa just as they are in other parts of the world.

African women and men practice one or the other of these religions, but no one escapes the African traditional religion of one's own people. It is woven so tightly into the culture that none can claim to have moved completely out of the spirituality of Africa's own religion as distinguished from the 'new religions' that have arrived in Africa, be that religion Christianity or Islam.

Concerns for peace and justice, for equality and liberation for all human beings characterise the endeavours of all persons and groups who see the church as a positive factor in Africa. Europeans had imposed systems that Africans knew little. Missionaries and colonisers were responsible for worse evils, such as racism, exploitation, domination, and a class system - all of which they introduced (Edet & Ekeya 1988:5). They grabbed and sold land. Africans now demand justice and equity *vis-a-vis* the West.

To what extent is this quest for the humanisation of interaction in the realm of North-South relations extended to justice and equity between women and men in Africa? From our studies we have come to some insights on the factors that influence women's lives in contemporary Africa.

5.7.4 Women's Theology

When African women do theology, they cannot help but reflect critically on all the experiences that I have shared here with you - and more besides. Arising out of our cultural roles, they are an asset to Africa because they work in the fields, at home, and now in the modern sectors of the economy and on political and academic planes. Yet this has not earned them independent identities or decision-making rights, in the full sense of the word, in the communities that they share with men. They continue to be called women, inferior and subordinate, firmly stuck in the function of child-bearing and homemaking. Since this attitude has remained unchanged, it handicaps their participation in church and in society. As Nthamburi has observed, "the contemporary woman in the theological field has to work to uncover all oppressive social structures which discriminate against women, so that women can take their proper place and role alongside men in the society, and in the declaring of total liberation from all forms of oppression. It should be an act of humanisation" (Edet & Ekeya 1988:10) .

In describing the roles that women play in the churches in Africa, one is struck by how traditionally feminine they are. We do not dispute the validity and necessity of these ministries, but we are distressed by the obvious lack of decisive action against societal exploitation and injustice. For women, Jesus is attractive and resourceful because he is a fighter for justice, a healer, and a teacher. I retell the story of Jesus because it speaks directly to those areas of women's lives where the reality of God is active and compelling. We find God in social justice and in the services of the church that respond to this need in society.

In Africa the concern with building up the church has become all-consuming and has limited woman's yearning for a fresh look and for decisive, liberating action, action that can provide her with the opportunity to function as an agent of God's liberating movement through the church of Christ. As Fanusie puts it: "the active involvement of women in the church can only be a reality when women are seen as real people, create in God's image" (Edet & Ekeya 1988:10).

We are convinced that the church can be more relevant and more effective in their service to the church, as they are in other walks of life where the barriers to women's intensive participation are crumbling. One area in the church's life that needs to see a new phase is its theological emphasis. This, I believe, is an area in which women should be fully involved.

For the purpose of this discussion we are describing theology in terms of finding ways in which knowledge of God and God's will for humanity and the universe are understood and responded to. From this broad description we can divide the theological enterprise into non-academic and academic or, more precisely, grassroots and professional. In my view the two are related, and they overlap. In many ways they also complement one another.

In grassroots theologising we find that African women in the traditional African community are quite accomplished theologians in their own right. I am saying this because the domestic role of women in Africa involves a lot of religious ritual. In community worship, women are priestesses. Both are sacred duties in which the traditional woman finds her deepest fulfilment and joy. This deeply spiritual life is sustained by a theology yet to be set down on paper but all too evident in women's prayers. The domestic rituals that revolve around the mother and her children are the traditional woman's deepest theological experience. Her performance of these rituals is

It is a statement of human dependence on constantly staying in touch with God and of the sanctity of covenant at relations. In times of great crisis a woman will resort to special ritual provisions whether she is baptised into Christ or not; a woman can always improvise. Women who are not baptised do so mor readily than Christian women. For example, my own mother Mpudu Nchabeleng who used to pray before she was baptised before going to bed "Mashego Mpabelele, Masegare a hlwele a ntahlile". (Meaning that a person needs protection and becomes more mentally composed because during the day a person goes up and down physically and mentally. In the night only darkness exists with its unpredictable evils). While remaining strong believers in the efficacy of prayers. Christian women seldom resort to the ritual provisions of their churches.

Christian women who are more minded of their Christian theologising are those who occupy more prominent places in their Christian Communities, such as prophetesses in the Independent Churches or leaders of basic Christian communities in the Roman Catholic Church. Such women will need to live exemplary Christian lives, which may require that they sever themselves from the traditional practices that the particular cultural community expects of them. It is a very hard stance to take, but if such women are to remain heads of churches - sponsored projects - they have to dissociate themselves from all that the Christian community considers to be incompatible with Christianity. By what theological criteria do these women make their decisions?

Women in such leadership positions desire to know more of the biblical background of their faith and more especially concerning the significance of women in the Bible for the Church, and for Christian theology. Women's theology in Africa is being done in Bible Studies, where women cease to be the docile and passive recipients of the wisdom/doctrine of the clergy. They are questioning the established order of things. In fact, the awakened awareness of the traditionally unquestioning women has scared some ecclesiastics into phasing out diocesan programmes involving women's development and leadership. It has become uncomfortable for the clergy concerned to head a congregation

of women who demand to know the wherefore, the what, and the how of their church's teachings and practices.

The rising number of young women with university degrees in religion include a few who are to be found quietly engaged in "revolutionary" activities, such as working with the destitute and the marginalised. They are theologians of the 'seed growing secretly'. Such quite proclamation of the word of God is indispensable in an Africa that is fast following the line of materialism and secularisation. On the other hand, there are in Africa those inspired by the dauntless courage and faith of relentless fighters such as Winnie Mandela, women who tackle anti-women legislation and church regulations (Edet & Ekeya 1988:11). She who would seek to call Africa to women's perspectives needs the spirit of justice and equity that moves the anti-apartheid struggle. Such a move can be sustained only by a theology of hope.

5.7.4.1 Hagar's Story (Gen 16)

Hagar is the first female in the Bible to liberate herself from oppressive power structures (Williams 1993:19). She took the risk rather than endure more brutal treatment by Sarai. Hagar's story is the story of exploitation and persecution suffered by a black woman at the hands of her mistress (Weems 1988:1). This is a story of ethnic differences that separated Hagar and Sarai - differences today which would manifest themselves between an African woman and a Hebrew woman, a woman of colour and a white woman, a Third World woman and a First World woman. This story of Hagar and Sarai encompasses more than ethnic prejudice. There is the story of ethnic prejudice exacerbated by economic and sexual exploitation. There is the story of conflict, women betraying women, mothers conspiring against mothers. This is the story of social rivalry (Weems 1988:2). Instead of Hagar be controlled by God, she was controlled by another woman, her mistress Sarai and by man, namely Abraham.

This story opens with Sarai, Abraham's wife who was barren. In ancient times a woman's self-worth and social status were pivoted around her family, namely, the reputation of her husband and more importantly, the number of children she bore, preferably males. So, Sarai's honour was affected by this paradoxical situation: she was wealthy but barren. In her time ability to reproduce and replenish the population was held at high esteem. Another contrasting situation is the fact that Sarai was old and rich while Hagar was young, fertile and poor. In fact Hagar was worse than poor because she was a slave. Here we notice powerfulness against powerlessness. Hagar was in actual fact Sarai's property even Hagar's body and mind. I am saying this because Hagar's opinion was never asked.

The main issue here was the fact that God, (Gen 12:13; 17:1-4) wanted a male heir who would retain Abraham's land and property holdings within the family and this heir had to be provided through the acceptable concubinage. The son born out of this concubinage would legally belong to Sarai. Thus, what the Lord had prevented of Sarai, Sarai set out to obtain through her slave. Sarai wanted to be esteemed through Hagar. Another point worth to be mentioned is the fact that Sarai had a fear that Abraham would give Ishmael (Hagar's son) something out of his property because of the fact that Ishmael was the biological son of Abraham as this was supported by Hebrew law of property. Even after Sarai's birth of the son of her own, being the legal heir of the family, the tension between the two women grew stronger.

This resulted in to Hagar being sent away, actually expelled from the house. This time Abraham played a role. It was Abraham and Sarai who both agreed to send the slave woman and her child away. Although Hagar was free, her mind was still in bonds. She found herself being a lonely woman in the wilderness without a family support. She was destitute with a hungry, crying child on her back to care for. It was oppressive, brutality and cruel for her to imagine to sent away by the father of her child. This is the real

situation of many black women especially in South Africa. Many women find themselves being single parents, having three to four children to bring up.

Hagar deserved more than just water and bread from Sarai and the father of her son, who were so wealthy. Bread and water were not enough for the journey back to Egypt after such a long service. Sarai thought only of her own security and that of her own son. God has shown mercy to Sarai by granting her a child from her own womb but in turn Sarai was not willing to show mercy to a woman whose back was up against the wall. Sarai had forgotten so quickly what it felt like to be rejected and scorned. She failed to remind her husband that his responsibility to the Egyptian woman and their child was beyond water and bread.

5.7.4.2 Survival, Quality and Life and God

Nevertheless Hagar, by way of her speech and religious experience, comes through to the reader as a person momentarily in control of her destiny. In the wilderness to which she has escaped, the issues of survival and quality of life come to the surface in Hagar's story. It is here in the wilderness story that we see God coming down to the black woman. The divinity is at work in the process. God choose and preferred the side of the suffering woman and intervened. The text reports that "the angel of Yahweh found her there by a spring in the desert, the spring on the road to Shur" (Genesis 16:7). With reference to the identity of the divinity here, the New Jerusalem Bible states that in most ancient texts the angel of Yahweh is not a created being distinct from God ... but God himself in visible form (Cane 1970:55). Most biblical scholarship agrees that in the patriarchal narratives "there is no clear distinction between the angel of the Lord and Yahweh himself" (Cone 1970:55). Thus the divinity is with Hagar in the midst of her personal suffering and destitute situation.

But Yahweh has other plans for Hagar, which will determine her survival and the quality of life she must form and endure for several years. First, God addresses and invites Hagar to speak, not Sarai, asking, "Hagar, slave-girl of Sarai, where have yo come from, and where are you going?" (Genesis 16:8). In these questions we see the concern of God about the unborn baby and the protection of the mother as well. "What God wants is that she and the child should be saved and at the moment, the only way to accomplish that is not in the desert, but by returning to the house of Abraham" (Williams 1993:21). "Ishmael had to be born in the House of Abraham to prove that he is the first born (Deut 21:15-17), and to enter into the household through the rite of circumcision (Chapter 17). This will guarantee him participation in the history of salvation and will give him rights of inheritance in the house of Abraham" (Tamez 1971:9).

While Tamez's observation has merit, her initial attempt to put this aspect of Hagar's experience with God into a liberation mode stretches the text beyond what it declares. The angel as I said above represented God who is the liberator. We can also speak of quality of life with regard to God's concern for Hagar and this point. Apparently God wants Hagar to secure her own and her child's well-being by using the resources Abraham has to offer.

5.7.4.3 Homelessness and Economic Realities (Gen 21)

At this point in the narrative, the issue of economic realities connects with the issue of homelessness. "Abraham has given Hagar and his son no economic resources to sustain them in their life away from his family (Williams 1993:29). Hagar and Ishmael seem consigned to a future of poverty and homelessness. Bread and flask of water would not sustain them on their journey which apparently had no destination. Gen (21:15-16) says, "She wandered off into the desert of Beersheba. When the skin of water was finished she abandoned the child under a bush. Then she went and sat down at a distance, about a bowshot away, thinking 'I cannot bear to see the child die'. Sitting at a distance, she

began so sob (Genesis 21:15-16). Hagar was left alone in the desert without anybody to protect or at least to sister her, and she had to face emotional pain and the death of her child whose father has thrown away without mercy. This is the experience of a black woman. Probably like Jesus, Hagar felt she was abandoned by God also. As mother and child wander off into the desert of Beersheba, I cannot help but wonder how their survival will be secured. The desert is hardly a place where a lonely woman and child ought to be wandering without sustenance, shelter or protection. With the help of God who came down to them in the form, probably of the Holy Spirit or the caring angel, Ishmael and Hagar maintained an autonomous existence (Genesis 21:17).

Unlike the Yahwist Narrative (Genesis 16), the Elohist narrative (Genesis 21) God called down to Hagar from Heaven, this time not through an angel gut God in person. Here beside the usage of the names Yahweh and Elohim we see the difference in the ways God intervened. Here God is transcendent. Neither is Ishmael mentioned by name as he is in Genesis 16, though the words 'God has heard' (Genesis 21:17) reflect the meaning of Ishmael's name according to Hebrew language and grammar.

In the address of God to Hagar, Hagar is not given chance to speak, but God gives her a command that if obeyed, will end the separation between mother and child (Ishmael is under a bush and Hagar is some distance away crying). This was a very terrible experience of wilderness wandering, too heavy for a poor woman to endure, but the tender loving care of God took its course. So God bids her to: Go pick the boy up and hold him safe, for I shall make him into a great nation. Then God opened Hagar's eyes and she saw a well, so she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink (Genesis 21:18-19). To the perspective of especially women, this act of God opening Hagar's eyes, is the opening of all women's eyes and minds to see the other side of God, as God who sees and cares for the suffering women. As God who is a well for thirsty women, thirsty of love, care and protection. Women especially in South Africa long for peace and joy. Their minds are opened to think the other way round about God who is

on their side, God who takes them so seriously, who is keen to involve and to use them in his project of planting equality among people. They were blinded by the patriarchal interpretations of this God and now they must see. Hagar is assured that, contrary to the child's near death appearance, he will be great. God renews the promise made to Hagar in Genesis 16 and to Abraham in Genesis 21:13. Ishmael will survive. We assume Hagar obeyed, for God gave her new vision to see survival resources where she saw none before (Williams 1993:32).

The last two verses in the Genesis 21 narrative reflect the real autonomy of Hagar and Ishmael, an autonomy facilitated by the reality that God was with the boy verse 20. The issue of homelessness is resolved in the statement, 'He grew up and made his home in the desert and he became an archer. He made his home in the desert of Parah (Genesis 21:20-21).

5.8 CONCLUSION

The African-American community has taken Hagar's story into itself. Hagar has spoken to generation after generation of black women because her story has been validated as true by suffering black American families in which a lone woman/mother struggles to hold the family together in spite of the poverty to which ruling class economics consign it (Williams 1993:33). Hagar, like many black women especially in Africa, goes into the wide world to make a living for herself and her child, with only God by her side.

This story exposes the many hidden scars and ugly memories of the history of relationships between racial ethnic and white women in South Africa and America. In South Africa today there is a classification between the so-called professional women and the so-called non-professional women. This is the principle that finds its basis on unchristian and unfaithful values. All women especially black women, are Hagar's daughters. They are all equals. Wealth, status and education are external factors which does not make a woman better than the others. It is just like colour discrimination which is so evil.

CHAPTER SIX

6. DIVERGENT VIEWS IN FEMINIST AND WOMANIST THEOLOGIES

6.1 Introduction

In her attempt to show differences between feminism and womanism, Williams (1995:112-113) gives an example of a dress which was not big enough for her in the shop. She argues that feminism sounds good but it is not enough, it does not provide enough material to fit the needs of black women. If you try to make feminism fit black women, you will not have the same thing.

According to Grand (1995:194), feminist theologians are white in terms of their race and in terms of the nature of the sources they use for the development of their theological perspectives. Feminist theologians' sources for women's experience refer almost exclusively to white women's experience black women's experience and white women's experience are not the same.

Feminism advances the cause of white supremacy. It is extending white women's privilege rather than fighting for the liberation of black women and all other black people. Feminism is not in any way concerned with black women's liberation. Black oppressed women cannot be involved in the Feminist Movement in church and society because feminism could not speak the language of black women. It does not tell the truth of the black women's historical existence. According to Hooks (Williams 1993:71-72) the first women's right advocates never sought social equality for all women, they were seeking social equality with white women. Feminists do not address racism but rather slavery. The basis of their attack was moral reform. While they strongly advocated an end to slavery, they seldom advocated a change in the racial hierarchy that allowed their caste status to be higher than that of black women or men. Black American women absented

themselves from the Feminist Movement because of its exclusive character. Feminism is limited as far as the black women's experience is concerned. It is limited to gender issues, especially patriarchy. There is a clear distinction between white women's and black women's oppression.

Grant (1989:195) further argues that feminist theology is racist. Although some feminist theologians are not racist, the movement has been so structured and therefore takes on a racist character. In a racist society, the oppressor assumes the power of definition and control while the oppressed is objectified and perceived as a thing. As such, white women have defined the movement and presumed to do so not only for themselves but also for non-white women.

> They have misnamed themselves by calling themselves feminists when in fact they are white feminists, and by appealing to women's experience when in fact they appeal almost exclusively to their own experience (Grant 1989:200).

Black women perceive white feminists to be racists who are interested in them only in order to accomplish the white woman's agenda. The hostility towards the feminist movement elaborated by some critics focuses on its implications for family life. Many view feminism as a direct threat to Black family life. This feminist movement, Carrunther maintains in Grant (1989:201), is a white family affair and is therefore totally irrelevant to the real needs of black women.

To say that many black women are suspicious of the feminist movement then, is to speak mildly about their responses to it. Feminism has its primary goal the suppression, if not oppression, of the black race and the advancement of the dominant culture. Judging from this ideology one can perceive that black feminism is a contradiction in terms.

According to Williams (1993:170), there are at least four areas where difference in womanist and feminist conceptualisations can give birth to dialogue that might enlighten both groups of women. These areas are:

1. In various cultural contexts, understanding, the meaning of "What is acceptably female".
2. Different and sometimes opposing hermeneutical positions.
3. Different responses to the question: What can we say about God's relation to the oppressed in history?

6.2 What is Acceptably Female?

Williams starts off by comparing and relating the Asian women's new idea of virgin Mary with African-American women's view. Like Asian women, black women today are apt to find alien the androcentric church's rendition of Mary, because she is either too clean, too high, and too holy or she is too sweet, to passive and too forgiving (1993:179). Within the context of North American culture where the white disdain of black permeates almost every idea and image advanced in the mainstream, African-American women must contend with the way the social appropriation of the Virgin Mary has contributed to the advancement of white supremacy. The Virgin Mary as a social construct has stood for purity and innocence, which were qualities assigned to white women (Williams 1993:180). Black women were construed by white social mythology to be loose, immoral, incapable of either innocence or purity. Williams concludes that the Virgin Mary can be a negative symbol for black women; 'too white' and 'too false' to represent what is acceptably (black) female. There is no denying the compatibility of African-American women's reality with Chung's statement that:

> When Mary is placed as a norm for ideal womanhood outside of Asian women's everyday, concrete, bodily

> experience, she becomes a source for disempowerment for Asian women.

Yet there are some questions the womanist to the appropriation and feminist dress of Mary in Chung's book. Asian women according to Chung as quoted in Williams (1993:180), "View the Virginity of Mary, not as a biological reality, but as a relational reality. Virginity as Chung puts it, lies in her true connectedness to her own self and to God. It is an inner attitude, not a psychological or external fact" (Williams 1993:180). Chung continues, stating that Asian women claim "when a woman defines herself according to her own understanding of who she really is and what she is meant for in this universe (and not according to the rules and norms of patriarch), she is a virgin" (Chung Kyung 1990:77). Chung further argues that her virginity persists in spite of sexual experience, child bearing and increasing age. Actually her virginity, her ability to be a self-defining woman, grows because of her full range of life experience.

> Virginity si the symbol for the autonomy of women. Virgin primarily means not "a woman who abstain from sexual intercourse" but a woman who does not lead a derived life, as daughter/wife/mother of men. She is a woman who matures to wholeness within herself as a complete person, and who is open to others (Chung Kyungs 1990:77).

The question here is, whether this feminist position on virginity plays into the hands of the patriarch. It claims to reject values and virtues to virginity just as patriarchally biblical and cultural traditions assign value and virtue to virginity. The problem of Williams is: "Why is the term virginity needed at all to describe women's independence and maturity, since the term is scared to the bone with male handling?" (Williams 1993:181). Are a new language and new adjectives needed? In the context of non-Christian Asian cultures is there something inherently positive about the term virgin and virginity that makes Asian Christian women want to claim these terms in their descriptions of femaleness?

Feminism understands virginity as a woman who is open for others as we have seen above, but womanism has a problem with this thrust of thinking, especially when taking into consideration the way in which African-American women are sexually exploited and their experience with social-role surrogacy, then according to Williams, they become reluctant to articulate an understanding of virgin without qualifying what that means. And since womanist theologians claim the importance of family (female, male and children) for women's liberation and survival, there would be concern about the loss of Joseph in the working out of the Christian story about Jesus and his mother.

The African-American family has for generations been under attack by white and colonial power structures that have been especially brutal toward black men. The loss of Joseph as an active participant in the unfolding of this story amounts to a breakdown in the portrayal of family.

For womanist theology, class distinction among women makes a difference in how the particular Asian woman appropriates the virgin and virginity language. Another related question is whether the Virgin Mary is a model of full womanhood and liberated humanity for all Christian Asian women irrespective of class position. The issue of class looms large in African-American cultural criticism and womanist theology, which probes the social, cultural, political and religious significance of the more than one-hundred year-old appropriation of the biblical Hagar by African-Americans. For womanist theology Hagar can be the model of full womanhood because of Hagar's African heritage and the congruence of her experience with African-American women's and the community's history much more than Mary of the feminist theology.

At the same time, womanists would be reticent to designate either Hagar or the Virgin Mary as models of liberated human being since both women are always powerless and never able to take care of their own business or set their own agenda for their lives (Williams 1993:182). Throughout most of the biblical story about her, Hagar was a slave,

and when she was freed, she was freed into poverty and what looked like an impossible life-situation. In Matthew's account of Mary's pregnancy, she is not presented as a free adult consenting in the matter of bearing the child Jesus. Matthew 18:1 (RSV) claims, "Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit. Neither is Joseph's consent considered before the fact. Rather the angel of the Lord makes pronouncement after pronouncement (18:21) to Joseph in a dream no conversation occurs between Mary and the angel of the Lord. Mary is voiceless, without speech in this Matthew text.

Though Luke in his account of Jesus' birth is generous enough to allow a conversation between the angel Gabriel and Mary, the story is however full of male pronouncements and mandates for Mary's life: "You will conceive, You shall call his name Jesus ... The holy spirit will come upon you... The power of the Most High will overshadow you... The child will be called holy" (Luke 1:31-35). Mary's response is "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord let it be done to me according to your words" (1:38). A servant can not disagree or refuse the jobs their masters assign them and still say in relation and favour with their employers/masters. The language which Mary used to describe herself as servant does not suggest free womanhood. Mary had no real choice. She could not say no, given the command language used by Gabriel. Is there danger of this female servant-hood language being appropriated socially in the male-dominated societies in which most women live, so that women's servant-hood is made to look like women's choice. The question of acceptable female identity in culture is important because its exploration often reveals what a society regards as good and beautiful.

> Among womanists and feminist theologians, heterosexual women and lesbian women can come together for serious dialogue to discover if there are ways heterosexual female culture oppresses lesbian women on the basis of homophonic responses to the question of what is acceptably female (Williams 1993:183).

Womanists, Anglo feminists, Hispanic feminists, Asian feminists and Native American feminists need much conversation about this issue, because many incentives exist in various cultures to pressure women of colour to shape images of themselves as closely as they can to those of white women. It is no secret that in American culture white Hispanic women are more favoured than dark-skinned Hispanic women by the society's power structures, in terms of distributions of goods and services. Some Asian-American women are undergoing surgery to remove the slant from their eyes. Many black women change their hair, to look more like white women. Not only in America but also in Africa black women are confronted with this problem (Williams 1993:184).

In dialogue, American womanist and feminist theologians can assess their theological anthropologies to discover whether this notion of white acceptable female is either inferred or assumed or even ignored. Feminist theologians have devoted much creative energy exposing the way the Western theological tradition has denied the full humanity of women and has denied that women are in the image of God. Female theologians must ask if their own anthropological positions have considered that in many cultures in order for women to be assumed to have any humanity at all, it must be white-woman humanity (Williams 1993:184). If this issue of white women as exclusive model of female humanity is not addressed in feminist and womanist theological anthropology, does the theology, by its silence on the issue not perpetuate the idea of white-woman humanity as the model of all female humanity? Does silence on this issue amount to serious female involvement in the roots of domination?

In addition to the above concerns, the differences in their understandings of the foundations of women's oppression can inaugurate lively discourse between womanists and feminists. African-American women's historic experience, as well as the community's appropriation of the Hagar-Sarah stories, makes visible the conflict and brutal treatment women with upper-class privilege can inflict upon women of lower classes. Most white feminists station this female behaviour under the umbrella of

patriarchy and therefore give very little serious attention to assigning some of the responsibility to women for this historical phenomenon of women oppressing other women.

6.3 Scope and Definition of Patriarchy

The feminist understanding of the patriarchal relation between women and society's institutions does not include black women's oppression resulting from their relation to the white controlled American institutions governing their lives. As far as black women are concerned, it is a misnomer to name oppressive rule with words that only identify men as oppressors of women, since white women join white men as oppressors of black women we need nomenclature and language which reflect this reality. Independent white feminists did, of their own volition and their own political benefit, oppress black women and other black people. White American women cannot be relieved of the responsibility for choices they made or make in their roles as oppressors. Many black women who work in white settings have seen white feminist groups use the positive side of white patriarchy to gain political, economic and educational advantages that mostly benefit white women. The positive side of patriarchy provides the media and means for keeping white women's issues at the forefront of the liberation movement and at the forefront of American conscience.

Feminism has failed to emphasise the substantial difference between their patriarchally-derived-privileged-oppression and black women's demonically-derived an nihilistic oppression and this failure renders black women invisible in feminist thought and action. In most feminist literature written by white American women, the words 'woman' and "women" signify only the white woman's experience.

The implication of all the preceding discussions is that black women, in their relation to white-controlled American institutions, do not experience patriarchy. It becomes

necessary, then, for black women, when describing their own oppressed relation to white-controlled American institutions to use new words, new language, and new ideas that fit their experience. These new words, language, and ideas will help black women to develop an appropriate theoretical foundation for the ideology and political action needed to attain the liberation of black women and the black family.

True enough, most Anglo-American women live only with the illusion of authority and power, which is mostly derived from powerful males. Nevertheless, white males and white females together often administer the mainline social system in America that oppress black women and the black family. Though many white feminists speak of multi-layered oppression, they do not give serious attention to the ways they participate in and help perpetuate the terrible social and cultural value systems that oppress all black people (Williams 1993:185). Very few if any discussions of patriarchy give full and serious attention to women's oppression of women.

Obviously African-American women need to devise their own terms, express their own ideas, garner their own support for describing black women's reality so that their oppression by black men, their oppression by white men and their oppression by white-male-white-female-dominated social system can be seen clearly. Womanist scholarship in theology needs to do more than borrow the vocabulary of white feminism to describe black women's world of relations. Womanists search deeply in the hidden 'underlays' of African-American language and culture to find the 'female stuff' with which to craft a world of meaning. Womanist words and descriptions must be true to the reality they claim to represent, black women's lived experience in the everyday world.

According to Williams patriarchy as a term to describe black women's relation to the white (male and female) dominated social and economic systems governing their lives - leaves too much out (Williams 1993:185). It is silent about class privileged women oppressing women without class privilege. It is silent about white men and white women

working together to maintain white supremacy and white privilege. It is silent about the positive boons patriarchy has bestowed upon many white women, for example, college education, the skills and credentials to walk into the jobs which the civil rights movements obtained for women. In some cases it is the choice to stay home and raise children and/or develop a career - and to hire another woman (usually a black one) to help out in either case. Williams feels that for patriarchy to be inclusive of black women's experience in white society, as at the moment is not the case, there needs to be discussion between womanists and feminists about a revision of the term.

Black and white women need to become conscious of the negative effects of their historic relations. When this is clearly seen and appreciated, perhaps white feminists will become more conscious of the ways in which their life-work perpetuates the oppressive culture of white supremacy. Then womanists can perhaps desist in questioning the sincerity of white feminism about the liberation of all women.

Feminists have, nevertheless, done solid and substantial theological work, which can inform some of the efforts of womanist theologians. The feminist identification of what they describe as the patriarchal character of the Bible has done a great service in showing the world that many portions of this book support the oppression of women. Yet both feminist and womanist Christian women agree that the Bible cannot be scrapped because it has been and continues to be fundamental in the life, faith and hope of many women. Most feminists and womanist Christian theologians agree that there is liberating world in the Bible.

6.4 Different and Opposing Hermeneutical Positions

Womanist hermeneutics must take seriously the assumption that the Bible is a male story populated by human males, divine males, divine male emissaries and human women mostly servicing male goals, whether social, political, cultural or religious. Thus, when

they probe the Bible for meanings relevant to African-American women's experience and faith, contemporary womanists engage a hermeneutical posture of suspicion. That say that another truth must be articulated.

Womanists have a slave cultural heritage of which we must be mindful. This cultural heritage, patterned by biblical motifs, is the context of the early Christian origins of African-Americans. It was this cultural heritage and its biblical patterning that transmitted to slaves the hope for liberation and the belief that God's power sustained their survival struggle. This slave way of using the Bible must be affirmed. Thus the womanist also engages a hermeneutical posture of affirmation as she attempts to discern both the Bible's message to black women and the meaning for black women of the biblically derived black cultural patterns. Womanists extract material from the biblical canon and shape it to fit into a black life context. This has been evidenced in their spiritual songs and in which God is depicted as father of the fatherless, mother of the motherless, sister of the sisterless as well as brother of the brotherless. The slave's creation of the spiritual songs was definitely related to the way in which they interpreted the Bible (Williams 1993:190).

The deposits of African-American culture suggest that liberation and survival were vital issues in slave consciousness. Thus the slave's questions with regard to Scripture were: What has God to say and do about our community's liberation, and survival? Put simplistically the womanist claim is that, for the slaves, Moses and Jesus (and God's action through them) was the answer to the former question.

And Hagar and Ishmael (and God's response to them) was the way the slaves answered the latter question. While we cannot romanticise it, we cannot forget the influence that African heritage must have exerted upon the African slave's interpretation of both the Bible and the new culture (American white) into which the slave was thrown with no preparation whatsoever.

Of course, Hagar's and Ishmael's life situation was like that of black female slaves and their children. Like Hagar they experienced harsh treatment from slave mistresses. Slave women were raped by slave masters. Slave masters fathered children by slave women, and then often disclaimed and sold them away to other plantations. Like Hagar and Ishmael when they were finally freed from the house of bondage, African-American ex-slaves were faced with making a way out of no way. They were thrown out into the world with no economic resources. The issue for Hagar and Ishmael and for the newly freed African-American slaves was quality of life. The question was and still is today, how can oppressed people develop a positive and productive quality of life in a situation where the resources for doing so are not visible.

Womanist survivalists/quality-of-life theology provides the theological explication of the survival principle of African-American biblical interpretation. Their hermeneutical principle is God's word of survival and quality of life to oppressed communities. They put a different emphasis upon biblical texts and identify with different biblical stories than do black liberation theologians.

However, some womanist theologians are more committed to the liberation/hermeneutic while other womanist theologians may be more committed to the survival/quality of life hermeneutic. Though both groups would perhaps agree that these two hermeneutical principles should be employed simultaneously in the interpretation of the biblical text, they obviously need to dialogue. The subjects of their conversation might be the different images of God issuing from the application of the two hermeneutical principle and the different responsibility (in the survival modality) put upon the community for the formation of a positive, productive quality of life. It could well be that some Hispanic feminist theologians and some Jewish feminist theologians, who understand survival to be a primary issue in their communities, might also join this dialogue.

The survivalists modality of God's word is not always compatible with what feminist and womanist liberations might want to hear. For example, the story of the Babylonian Captivity is useful for black American descendants of slaves trying to survive in economic captivity in North America. Parts of this story tell people how to survive bondage and how to secure their quality of life. In Jeremiah, God's word to Jews (who are free) is that some of them will be taken into captivity into Babylon. Then, when they are in Exile in Babylon, Jeremiah sends a letter containing God's word to the Exiles. This word is a female-male inclusive "survival and quality of life" word. In Jeremiah 29:4-7, God, having promised survival to the exiled Jews, sends these commands to the captives:

> Build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters, take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters, multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

While extensive womanist exegesis is required to gain in-depth meaning here, some surface remarks can be made about this text. We can respond to the question of how the womanist survival quality-of-life hermeneutic initially interprets the text. First of all, community responsibility is commanded in the work of survival of the group. Whereas the promises of the survival of the progenies of Abram and Hagar were the responsibility of the God they knew (or who knew them). These exiles in Jeremiah apparently have the choice of multiplying or decreasing. Oppressed black Americans, female and male, will understand this text to be advice about how to oppose the genocide they experience from time to time in America. Sons and daughters are to be involved in this work of guarding and opposing genocide. Both sons and daughters are to be involved in and produced by this group's reproduction history. In addition to the production of humans, this

reproduction history includes an economic dimension, building houses (producing homes for themselves) and planting gardens (producing food for themselves).

Then there is God's advice that black Americans might not want to hear: 'Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare'. In other words, seek the welfare of your oppressors? African-Americans in the diaspora can perhaps hear the silence in the text reiterate what their experience in America has taught: when the white-controlled power structures and ordinary white people are prosperity, then black people are at least not brutalised as badly. When the white controlled power structures and ordinary white people are suffering economically and when the white population decreases, black people are brutalised and scapegoated in every possible way. While oppressed people live in territories controlled by their oppressors, the welfare of the oppressed is tied into the welfare of oppressors. Therefore, black people may hear this text suggesting that the oppressed should become engaged in politics and prayers as a way of seeking the welfare of the city, as well as their own welfare (Williams 1993:195).

What womanist survival/quality-of-life hermeneutics cannot forget about this exile of Jews told in the book of Jeremiah is God's promise that one day they will be free to return to their country. When they did return they were, like the newly freed African-America slaves and like Hagar and Ishmael, faced with the issue of survival without proper economic resources. Not only God, but also the community must work on behalf of its survival and the formation of its own quality of life. The womanist survival/quality-of-life hermeneutic means to communicate this to black Christians. Liberation is an ultimate, but in the meantime survival and prosperity must be the experience of our people and God has had, and continues to have, a word to say about the survival and quality of life of the descendants of African female slaves.

6.5 God's Relation to the Oppressed in History

When womanist theologians engage in a survival/quality-of-life hermeneutic in the interpretation of biblical texts, an image of God emerges different from the liberator God championed in some liberation theology. Dialogue is needed here.

Latin American biblical scholar Tamez in her book *The woman who complicated the history of Salvation*, according to Williams (1993:196) re-reads the Hagar-Sarah text from the context of Christian immersed in the process of liberation and sees liberative impulses in God's actions in relation to Hagar and Ishmael. William's womanist reading, however, does not see God's action in this text as particularly liberative. She comes to the text from a Christian context of concern for poor black woman, children and men immersed in a fierce struggle for physical, spiritual and emotional survival and for positive quality of life formation (Williams 1993:196). Thus while Tamez sees in the text God's word of liberation to the slave woman of African descent, a black American womanist reading from the context of a survival/quality-of-life struggle, sees God responding to the African slave Hagar and her child in terms of survival strategies.

The two times that God relates directly to Hagar are in the context of helping her come to see the strategies she must use to save her life and her child's life. The first strategy is to go back to her oppressor and make use of the oppressor's resources. The second survival strategy not only has to do with the woman and child (family) depending upon God to provide when absolutely no other provision is visible, but also includes, upon God's command, the woman Hagar lifting up her child and holding him fast with your hand (Genesis 21:18 RSV). According to some biblical scholars this literally means "make your had firm upon him" which is idiomatic for lending support and encouragement to the child.

The assurance of the survival of mother and child comes from God, who reiterates the promise "for I will make him a great nation" (Genesis 21:186). In the Hebrew testament world-view, one survived through one's progeny and ancestors.

The feminist 'liberation lens' and the womanist 'survival lens' can however on occasion, provide a common vision. A case in point is Genesis 16:9, when God tells the run-away slave Hagar to return and submit herself to Sarah, who has physically abused Hagar in a most brutal way. Though the interpretation of this text has been an issue in biblical scholarship, Tamez interprets it in a way consistent with what a womanist survival/ quality-of-life hermeneutic would yield.

What God wants is that she and the child should be saved, and at the moment, the only way to accomplish that is not in the desert, but by returning to the house of Abraham. Ishmael was not yet born. The first three years of life are crucial. Hagar simply must wait a little longer, because Ishmael must be born in the house of Abraham to prove that he is the first-born (Deuteronomy 21:15-17), and to enter into the household through the rite of circumcision (Chapter 17). This will guarantee him participation in the history of salivation, and will give him rights of inheritance in the house of Abraham.

What God is concerned about Ishmael's and Hagar's survival. There are some questions womanists must ask about God's relation to the terms of survival upon which Hagar lives in Abraham and Sarah's household. Does God care more about the oppressor Sarah than about the oppressed Hagar? When Sarah becomes jealous of Ishmael and decides that he, though first born, will not inherit along with her son Isaac, she demands that Hagar and Ishmael be thrown out of the house. Abraham opposes this, but God intervenes telling him to do as Sarah asked. What are we to say about God's action here? Can we conclude that what looks like God favouring the oppressor female is just the way the story is told in the Bible, that it is not necessarily the way God actually behaves with regard to the relationship between oppressed and oppressor? If we answer this question

affirmatively, do we not discredit all biblical descriptions of God's action in relation to humankind?

According to Williams (1993:198) Tamez does not question God's favouring the oppressor Sarah over the oppressed Hagar. Rather, in a liberation mode she concludes: "God let her [Sarah] act that way because he had other plans for Hagar, a better future than in the house of Abraham. According to Williams there is nothing in Hagar's story and Ishmael's future seems highly precarious and more threatened than their existence in Abraham's house (Williams 1993:198).

Nevertheless African-American women, as well as African-American people in general, have through the years found hope in Hagar's story. I believe the hope oppressed black women get from the Hagar-Sarah texts has more to do with survival and less to do with liberation. When they and their families get into serious social and economic straits, black Christian women must believe that God will help them make a way out of no way. This is precisely what God did for Hagar and Ishmael when they were expelled from Abraham's house and were wandering in the desert without food and water. God opened Hagar's eyes and she saw a well of water that she had not seen before. In the context of the survival struggle of poor African-American women this translates into God providing Hagar with new vision to see survival resources where she saw none before. God's promise to Hagar throughout her story is one of survival of her progeny and not liberation. In Hagar's story liberation according to Williams is self-initiated and oppressor-initiated. Human initiative sparks liberation - not divine initiative (Williams 1993:198). In Genesis 16 Hagar liberates herself. She is a run-away slave. In Genesis 21 Sarah, her oppressor, initiates Hagar's liberation. God merely agrees with Sarah. In both instances Hagar is liberated into precarious circumstances.

Conclusion

On the basis of the Hagar-Sarah texts the feminist and womanist liberationist and the womanist survival/quality-of-life advocates may provide different responses to the question, How does God relate to the oppressed in History? The liberationist may say God relates primarily to liberation efforts. The survivalists may say God relates primarily to survival/quality-of-life efforts. Some feminists and womanists may say God relates to the oppressed both says at different times or at the same time.

Again, the issue is not who is right or wrong. The issue is an understanding of biblical accounts about God that allows various communities of poor, oppressed black women and men to hear and see the doing of the good news in a way that is meaningful for their lives.

The truth of the matter may well be that the Bible gives license for us to have it both ways: God liberates but God does not always liberate all the oppressed. God speaks comforting words to the survival and quality-of life struggle of many families. The biblical stories are told in a way that influences us to believe that God makes choices. God changes whenever God wills, but Christian women are apt to declare as Hagar did, "Thou art a God of Seeing" (Genesis 16:15). And seeing means acknowledging and ministering to the survival/quality-of-life needs of women and their children.

6.6 Christological Differences

6.6.1 Jesus in Womanist Theology and Feminist Theology

Grant (1989:195) makes clear that, although feminist theology has given an important critique on the sexist limitations of the dominant theologies of Europe and North America, it shows serious limitations when it is evaluated in the light of black women's

experience. It has reflected the experience of white women predominantly, it fails to reflect the concerns of non-white and non-western women (Grant 1989:195). The question she asks in her books is: How are these limitations serious, especially as they are related to Christology?

Feminist theologians have not done overwhelmingly substantial amounts of work in the area of Christology (Grant 1989:63). Grant believes that reason is due primarily to the problematic nature of the doctrine itself. The question is: What is especially problematic for feminists regarding Christology? The problem has centred in the indisputable fact that the historical Jesus was indeed a male. Some have attempted to retard (and others, with remarkable success, have retarded) the leadership of women, in the church and the larger society, because of this very fact.

6.6.1.1 Jesus in Womanist Theology

What has Jesus Christ to do with the status of women in the church and society? It is this very question which serves as the basis of Grant's Christological inquiry. It is Grant's claim that there is a direct relationship between their perception of Jesus Christ and their perception of themselves. According to Grant (1989:63), Ludwig Feuerbach sheds some light on this relationship. He describes the content of this relationship as one of self-objectification. He argues that the object of any subject is nothing else than the subject's own nature taken objectively.

With Jesus Christ as the object on to whom the subject projects, it is important to discern who represents the subject. From the feminist perspective, Feuerbach (Grant 1989:63) unwittingly makes a significant point as he argues "Man has given objectivity to himself, but has not recognised the object as his own nature". Perhaps Feuerbach intended the generic use of the male language. However, it is the argument of feminist theologians that generic language is in fact no more than male language which represents a male

perspective. Man has, in fact projected himself as the subject with the authority to say who Jesus Christ is for us (men and women) yesterday, today and tomorrow. Since man, according to Grant (1989:64) is limited by his social context and interests, Jesus Christ has been defined within the narrow parameters of the male consciousness. That is to say, the social context of the men who have been theologising has been the normative criterion upon which theological interpretation has been based. What this has meant is that Jesus Christ has consistently been used to give legitimacy to the customary beliefs regarding the status of women.

What happens when Christological reflection starts from the tridimensional experience of racism/sexism/classism? Grant argues that Jesus Christ has been and remains, imprisoned by the socio-political interests of those who historically have been the keepers of the principalities and powers.

She points that there are three ways in which Jesus has been imprisoned (Grant 1995:131):

1. The imprisonment of Jesus Christ by patriarchy.
2. The imprisonment of Jesus Christ by white supremacy.
3. The imprisonment of Jesus Christ by privileged class.

6.6.1.2 The Imprisonment of Jesus Christ by Patriarchy

In accordance with Grant (1989:68), patriarchy represents a condition in which men dominate women. Its reality is defined from the perspective of men, and women are always relegated to secondary subordinate roles, but patriarchy refers to more than a socially prescribed hierarchy of sex roles. The term connotes the whole complex of sentiments, the patterns of cognition and behaviour, and the assumptions about human nature and the nature of the cosmos that have grown out of a culture in which men have

dominated women. Patriarchalism therefore is a way of looking at all of reality so that roles are not assigned to women and men arbitrarily but they represent systematic, objective, ordered, logical and rational analyses. Patriarchalism, then, refers to a metaphysical world view, a mind set, a way of ordering reality which has more often been associated with the male than with the female in Western culture. It is a social system maintaining male dominance and privilege based on female submission and marginality.

In the course of Christian history, men have defined Jesus Christ so as to undergird their own privileged positions in the church and society. Jesus is used to justify the subordination of women in the church. The context of this use is patriarchy, the complex of sentiments and patterns of cognition and behaviour, and the assumptions about human nature articulated in a culture in which men have dominated women.

Theology and Christology have developed in this context. Characteristically then, in theology and Christology, the male-masculine in projected as the valued entity and the female-feminine is projected as devalued entity. In effect, there is the institutionalisation of dual existence.

The result of this context is that, neither women nor men can imagine themselves outside their socially prescribed roles. Christological views have been sustained that, just as Jesus has power and authority over men and women, men have power and authority over women and children.

This Christology over-emphasises the maleness of Jesus, which has a negative impact on the understanding of women's personhood, leadership and equality in church and society. In criticising this negative Christology for women, womanist theologians refer to white and black theology. Because Jesus Christ represents the essence of the Christian faith, ti is important that theologians ground their interpretations in the very nature of the faith. In this way, their analysis is believed to have greatest authenticity and authority for,

defining the meaning of Christianity. If we could determine that the status of women in the society was condoned by Jesus, then we would believe that the same status must be maintained now, henceforth and forevermore (Grant 1989:75). Implicit in this argument is not only the primary question of whom Jesus chose, but who or what he, Jesus, was.

6.6.1.3 The Historical Imprisonment of Jesus Christ by White Supremacy Ideology

Here Grant criticises white feminist theology. For African-American women, the sin of sexism is accompanied by the sin of racism. This is reflected in the negative colour symbolism (God and devil, light and dark) institutionalised in Christian theology. White feminist theology fails to recognise this. White imagery is presented as normative to the exclusion of any other possible imagery or Jesus or God Representing God or Jesus as white means in fact to deify 'whiteness'. In this way Jesus and God were identified with the oppressive forces in society.

6.6.1.4 The Historical Imprisonment of Jesus Christ by the Privileged Class

This refers to the point that the image of Jesus as Servant has consistently been used to reinforce servant bondage among black people. A look at the relationship between white women and black women vis-a-vis domestic service demonstrates that the Christian notion of servanthood has historically been used to create an obedient mentality in politically oppressed people.

What we need now is a challenge to Christian theology at the point of its racist, sexist, and servant language.

Black women must explicitly ground their analysis in multiple voices in order to highlight the diversity, richness, and power of black women's ideas as part of a long-standing African-American women's intellectual community.

Afro-American women were regarded as 'outsiders within' in the academic world. Maria W Stewart, the first black woman political writer in the United States asked: "How long shall the fair daughters of Africa be compelled to bury their minds and talents beneath a load of iron pots and kettles"? (Hayes (1995:5). This is a clear picture of the marginalisation of African-American women under the iron rule of white feminists.

Today, womanist scholars are revealing that the minds and talents of black women were not fully engaged with those pots and kettles, but sought consistently to express themselves in a world which did not always welcome their creativity. Black-American women encouraged one another to wake and arise, no more to sleep or slumber but to distinguish themselves, to show forth to the world that they are endowed with noble and exalted faculties.

What they need now is a challenge to Christian theology at the point of its racist, sexist and servant languages.

6.6.2 A Womanist Jesus

Grant (1995:138), realises that African-American women's understanding of Jesus helps them to see how black women are empowered in appropriating Jesus, even in spite of the historical oppressive presentations of him. What they find in the experience of African-American women is a process of mutual liberation: "Jesus was liberating or redeeming African-American women, as African-American women were liberating or redeeming Jesus" (Grant 1995:138). Grant postulates that the Jesus of African-American women has suffered a triple bondage or imprisonment as well. According to her Jesus has been held captive to the sin of patriarchy (sexism), the sin of white supremacy (racism), and the sin of privilege (classism).

As such Jesus has been used to keep women in their proper place and blacks meek, mild, and docile in the face of brutal forms of dehumanisation. In spite of this oppressive indoctrination, Jesus Christ has been a central figure in the lives of African-American women. One finds four symbols in the liberation of Jesus from his imprisonment by patriarchy, white supremacy and classism; Jesus as co-sufferer, who empowers women because of their mutual suffering. Because Jesus was not only a man but also God incarnate, women found their connection with the divine. Jesus as equaliser, in the white world and the black world. His crucifixion was for universal salvation. If the man may preach, because the Saviour died for him, a woman on equal footing must also preach because the Saviour died for her. Jesus means freedom, the central message of the gospel is to free humans from bondage (Luke 4:18). Jesus is liberator. The liberation activities of Jesus empower African-American women to be significantly engaged in the process of liberation. Jesus inspires hope in the struggle for resurrected liberated existence.

Looking back at the methods for biblical hermeneutics developed by feminist theologians, one can say that those strategies which help to investigate the relationship between the oppression of women and theological symbolism are important in womanist theology and Christology.

I concur with Grant that, unlike feminist Christology, womanist Christology is much more dealing with Jesus' humanity than with his maleness. The strategies of these theologians in the interpretation of the Bible therefore are focussing on the elements which clarify Jesus' humanity, his life and ministry, the crucifixion and the resurrection. These elements tell womanist readers of the Bible that God became concrete in Jesus.

6.6.3 Conclusion

The very title of Jacquelyn Grant's book *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus*, suggests divergences in the citational chains by which these different groups of

women practise Christology. Grant shares with white theologians such as Ruether the desire to liberat[e] ... Jesus from oppressive and distorted interpretations", arguing, like Ruether, that the "significance of Christ is not his maleness, but his humanity" (82:120). I could criticise her on similar grounds, but I find more to Grant's prefiguration of Jesus than a simple reinstatement of 'humanity'.

Grant differentiates herself from white feminist theologians, for whom "the maleness of Jesus is superseded by the Christness of Jesus". In other words, what is divine about Jesus is also found in the 'new humanity' represented by those around him, figured in Ruether's case as 'sisterhood'. Grant finds premature this emphasis on sisterhood as paradigmatic of divinity, presuming solidarity with oppressed women that does not yet exist (144, 200).

She finds that Christian black women have historically understood Jesus as companion and co-sufferer, whose suffering was not merely human but that of God incarnate. I understand this as asserting a different kind of 'Christness' to that of the white feminist theologians. For Grant, black women's "affirmation of Jesus as God meant that White people were not God" (212:13). This Jesus too identifies with the 'least of the least' - those on the bottom of Fiorenza's hierarchical pyramid who are, for Grant, black women.

Grant does not mean her claim to lead to a contest as to whose oppression is the worst. Black women, in Grant's text, figure a particularised universality, much as Sojourner Truth figures, for Schüssler Fiorenza and Haraway, a similarly 'specific' universal - through their connection to the oppressed of all categories. As black, they suffer with black men, as women, with white and Third World women; and, as disproportionately poor, with the poor of all races and ethnicities (Grant, 216:17).

The community of black women figures Christ, who also identified with the oppressed, but *this* community is not, in turn, figured by Sojourner Truth. Grant lists Sojourner Truth

in a catalogue of 'womanists' including Jarena Lee, Ida B. Wells, and Mary McLeod Bethune. She is cited as a theologian and as a preacher, but in the guise of consultant, not exemplar; her witness is weighted no more strongly than that of the other women in Grant's list. She is not used to bear the weight of an entire methodology, or an entire class of people; that is, not until the very end of Grant's book.

Grant found Sojourner Truth there in a familiar role: that of judge. Grant grants her the (literally) last word, ending her final chapter with a long quote from the "Ain't I a Woman" speech. Truth comments on the anxiety she is provoking in her mostly white audience, comments on black women's downtrodden history and prophesies their rising, and finally asserts her place as observer and judge: "I am sittin' among you to watch; and every once in a while I will come out and tell you what time of night it is" (222). The Sojourner Truth I have been tracing through this citational chain is a trickster after all. She figures here Grant herself, but not necessarily in any divine guise; merely as womanist theologian, academic guardian of black women's interests, timekeeper of the race.

Grant recognises that, for Christians, "there is a direct relationship between our perception of Jesus Christ and our perception of ourselves" (63). Therefore I don't find it surprising that three academic theologians, McLaughlin, Fiorenza, and Grant, as well as one academic feminist theorist, Haraway, find in Jesus (promisingly mediated by the figure of Sojourner Truth) avatars of themselves, whether woman priest, academic trickster, guardian, or judge.

How much 'disruption', then, can I really attribute to the potent figure of Truth? Does her invocation in the citational chain of figures of refigurations of Jesus that Grant have been forging deviate this chain in promising directions?

One possible answer is suggested by womanist theologian Williams's work in *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (1993). Williams' analyses of *antebullum* and *postbellum* African-American women's experiences have been immensely important and challenging in both womanist and feminist theological discourse, in documenting the ways in which black women have historically been placed in roles of surrogacy. Williams situates these analyses in the context and memory of "ordinary spiritual black women" who accounted for their perseverance in struggle 'on the basis of their faith in God who helped them 'make a way out of no way' (xi). The 'subjects' of Williams's theology are not meant to be academicians, or necessarily the 'least of the least'. Williams wants to do theology for "those black women who are not in the limelight like Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth and Mary McLeod Bethune", working women and church women whose everyday practices have been those of perseverance and survival for themselves and for their children (241, n. 1).

I think that the very inconicity, the extraordinariness, of a Sojourner Truth, bearer of qualities which arise less from her own incredible accomplishments than from her continual citation and re-citation as extraordinary and iconic, qualities which make her so useful a figure in white feminist discourse, is what disqualifies her as a model for Williams's 'ordinary black women'. Sojourner Truth belongs among the catalogue of models invoked by 'race men' and 'race women' who, elite and educated, perpetuated a model of white Victorian 'true womanhood' for black women, emphasising women's place in the home rather than in the political arena. These models speak for, but not to, 'ordinary black women'. While she does not undervalue their contribution in making at least middle-class black women more politically visible, Williams sees the race women, as Grant sees white feminist theologians, as subscribing too uncritically to assertions that Christian sisterhood among women of all races was forthcoming.

Williams needs a figure compatible with the kind of womanhood historically experienced by working black women. This experience, not wholly congruent with black male

experiences of oppression, is specified by Williams as both 'coerce' and 'voluntary' surrogacy. Coerced surrogacy encompasses the alienation of black women's sexuality and labour in slavery, where they bore children to their white owners, nurtured owners' children, and worked 'men's jobs' in the fields. After the abolition of slavery, social and economic pressures kept black women in such substitutionary roles of 'voluntary' surrogacy as domestics for white families, or heads of their own single-parent families (Williams 1993:60-61).

Black women's resistance to oppression has also historically taken different forms from that of black men, Williams argues (150). The God who speaks to Williams' ordinary black women is not the Liberator God of the Exodus event, God or Abraham and Sarah, but the God of Hagar, Abraham's and Sarah's slave. By reading black women's experiences of surrogacy and survival through the story of Hagar's 'wilderness experience', Williams figures the experiences which have shaped many black women's lives without, I believe, asserting that this experience is normative to or formative of all women.

Hagar is a single mother forced into sexual surrogacy because her owner's wife was barren; she runs away from slavery with her son into the wilderness, is sent back into bondage by God, and finally is cast out with no resources for survival. She, like Sojourner Truth, has a long history of citation in African-American culture. Unlike Truth, she is not inserted in a Christic citational chain. Her relationship with God, as read by Williams, consists not in liberation but in God's granting her the vision to see resources for survival where none existed before (5). Hagar, figuring the God black women invoke in Williams' introduction, 'makes a way out of no way'.

This figure of Hagar is powerful to me because it is both collective and specific, because as Williams puts it, "today many black women like Hagar, raising families alone, demonstrate courage and personal ingenuity as they struggle to find resources for

survival" not because it figures a new methodology. I find Hagar a much more troubling and unsettling figure than Sojourner Truth for white feminist theorists and theologians. She is not so easily subsumed into a paradigmatic 'humanity', or 'womanhood', or even 'black womanhood'. For Williams, Hagar performs a similar function in regard to womanist theology, embodying the fractures of class across a solidarity that does not exist in 'the black community'.

Hagar's figure is also powerful to me because it performs theological and not simply theoretical work. Hagar is a Jesus figure for the late twentieth century in that she cannot be used to deny or negate suffering. She speaks to the impossibility of theodicy, offering only a chastened hope that, while God neither prevents nor provokes suffering, she/he does compassionately, 'make a way out of no way'.

I succumb, however, to the temptation to figure Hagar for my own theoretical purposes as well. If Sojourner Truth stands in for Jesus in white feminist reconstructions of Christology, then Williams's work leads us to ask in what ways the figure of Sojourner Truth performs surrogate work for white feminist and/or black womanist theologians. I find Hagar figured as reminder of this danger in Williams's chapter on "Womanist Feminist Dialogue: Differences and Commonalities". Here Williams discusses Mary, for a figure I have not addressed, but whose chain of figurations also runs through feminist and womanist theological discourse, often as a corrective to the maleness-of-Jesus problem.

In conversation with Asian women, Williams questions in what ways the Virgin Mary can be seen as "'a model of full womanhood and liberated humanity' for all Christian Asian women irrespective of class position", noting that Hagar has served as such a model to African-American women (181-82). Williams remains reluctant to designate either Mary or Hagar as models of "full womanhood", because neither woman sets her own agenda. They both perform surrogate roles.

Both Mary and Hagar, caught up in situations beyond their control, emerge as paradigmatic figures only *because* they are so caught up. As such, they figure for me (though not, perhaps, for Williams) my own paradoxical and oxymoronic version of "humanity", in the way I have been trying to describe by speaking of 'citationality'. If Sojourner Truth is the bearer, for the white feminist theologians and theorists here, of promising ambiguity, then Hagar presents me with an ambiguous promise: that it is in our own formation, whether by oppressive structures or not, that agency paradoxically lies. If Hagar/Sojourner Truth/Jesus is a shapeshifter, and we are to re(as)semble 'him', then we are shapeshifters too. Hagar, as I have read her in Williams, refigures resistance as a matter of everyday acts, as a repetitive performance of re-citation that calls oppressive norms into question. Theology and theory merge in the grace that attends these efforts, in their tenuous extensions and moments of radical resignification.

6.7 THE COMMON THEMES OF FEMINIST AND WOMANIST THEOLOGIES

Though differences do exist in their cultural contexts, social location and experiences, feminists and womanists hold in common a belief that sexism exists in most institutional expressions of the Christian religion in North America. Many feminists and womanists agree that a serious and critical review of Christian symbols, doctrines and practices is necessary in order to determine precisely how and if women's oppression can be supported by their religion. With regard to the concern and the context of sisters in the wilderness, common ground exists between some feminists and womanists who are reviewing Christian doctrine.

Just as the womanist view of black women's experience in Williams (1993) some Anglo-Feminist analysis has also led to questioning the Christian theories of atonement on the basis of the abuse of women and children. Feminist scholars Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker take a critical look at the idea of suffering developed in Christian theories of atonement. Though some of their ideas are vastly different from what Williams

projects, Brown and Parker claim, (as I do, that most of the history of atonement theory in Christian theology supports violence, victimisation and undeserved suffering (Brown and Parker 1989:2). Brown and Parker also assert that the central image of Christ on the cross as the saviour of the world communicates the message that suffering is redemptive.

There are also commonalities among some of the ideas of Williams and some of the ideas of Brown (1989) in her book *God-Talk*. This is especially noticeable in Brown's article "God is as Christ does: Toward a womanist theology". Brown believes that womanist theologians must reflect upon at least two aspects of black women experience and the complexity of their distinctive oppression.

The research Williams did into black women's sources revealed to her the complexity of black women's oppression and the simplistic way in which that experience has been reduced to race, gender or class categories. When she viewed black slaves with regard to every activity and relation in which they were involved to make slavocracy work, it became clear to her that black women's bodies had been exploited to a degree matched by no other group in the society.

White women as a group, did not experience such a complete exploitation of their bodies as did black women. Black women's labour, their nurturing capacity and their sexuality was made available to any powerful white person who wanted to sue black women. Like Brown, Williams realised the distinctive complexity of black women's heritage of oppression. From this kind of realisation the surrogacy language came into the womanist god-talk. Certainly Williams is in agreement with Brown's contention that black women's survival and achievement record, achieved in spite of complex oppression, is a vital source for womanist theology.

The story of black Christian women's fortitude cannot be accurately told without Jesus, whom these women have historically regarded as their helpmate on their journey. While

Williams does not explore Christological questions, but rather briefly provides a response surrounding redemption and atonement. There is an assumption here that womanist theology must, in many theological areas, render an understanding of Jesus Christ. Williams agrees with Brown's statement that "womanist theology must be very selective in the language and symbols used to describe and point to Jesus Christ's particular meaning for black women" (Brown 1989:16).

She would however, add that they (womanists) must re-shape the Christological question so that our consideration of the issue does not just speak to and have relevance in the academy. They must, for instance, ask if the classical Christological distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith is the proper emphasis if black Christian women's experience is shaping the content of their talk about Jesus Christ. Her research tells her that Brown is correct when she says, "womanist theology must always make it clear that the ultimate significance of Christ is not predicated on skin colour or gender but on sustaining and liberating activity" (Williams 1993:202). Regardless of how tempting it may be to describe Christ in biological likeness of a black woman, as a quick and easy means to allow black women to see themselves in Christ and Christ in themselves, to do such a thing is theologically misleading. Although Christ can certainly be embodied by a black woman, it is more in keeping with black women's testimonies to Jesus and Jesus' own self-understanding, if womanist theology describes Christ as being embodied the entire black community, male and female (Williams 1973:203).

Black women are, then, more apt to see Jesus/Christ as spirit sustaining survival and liberation efforts of the black community. Thus black women's question about Jesus Christ is not about the relation of his humanity to his divinity or about the relation of the historical Jesus to the Christ of faith. Black women's stories in the first part of the book and Cheryl Gilkes description of an Afrocentric biblical tradition attests to black women's belief in Jesus/Christ/God involved in their daily affairs and supporting them. Jesus is their mother, their father, their sister and their brother. Jesus however is to function in

a supportive way in the struggle. Whether we talk about Jesus in relation to atonement theory or Christology, womanists must be guided more by black Christian women's voices, faith and experience than by anything that was decided centuries ago at Chalcedon.

Our black communities are engaged in a terrible struggle for life and well-being. All of our talk about God must translate into action that can help our people live. Womanist theology is significant only if it contributes to this struggle. They must, like Hagar, obtain through our God-given faith new vision to see survival and quality-of-life resources where we have seen none before since feminists and womanists come from many cultures and countries, womanist-feminist dialogue and action may well provide some of the necessary resources. Recognising and honouring their differences and commonalities can lead in directions they can perhaps both own.

6.8 SUMMARY

The two theologies reflections are grounded in experience. Both bear the mark of a colonised people. The influence of both the socioeconomic and religio-cultural realities is apparent in the development of the two theologies. In both cases Jesus Christ is seen as a liberating figure. Neither position is disturbed by the maleness of Jesus (implying that it is accidental to the liberation process. Both are fighting against patriarchy.

Though both are liberation struggles, in womanist theology there is the extension of class, racism and liberation for black males also i.e. there is the different in focus between. However, there is the difference in the cultural background for feminist from womanist theology.

CHAPTER SEVEN

AFRICAN CULTURE AND THE WOMANIST THEOLOGY: A CONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENT

In this concluding chapter, I would like to focus on the bondage of women to men and to what extent women in Africa and especially Southern Africa, were affected by African culture. The women's liberation movements, like Feminism and Womanism, endeavour to free women from the domination of men. These are the theologies that express discontent with the male-dominated structure both in society and in the church. These theologies challenge the use often made of God and other religious concepts and doctrines to justify women's subjugation.

7.1 Culture as a Source of Oppression of Women in South Africa

Culture according to the World Council of Churches Assembly in Vancouver (1985:154) is "that which holds a community together, giving it a common framework of meaning". Culture is made up of historically derived ideas and values attached to traditions. It is a repertoire of learned behaviours which are socially transmitted. So I can say that culture is a complex whole, it includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, social heredity and social behaviour. It is a product of actions.

Culture is preserved in language, ideas and thought patterns, ways of life, attitudes, symbols and presuppositions. It is celebrated and actualised in art, music, dance, drama, literature and life itself. It constitutes the collective memory of the people and the collective heritage which will be passed from generation to generation. It has got to do with human values and the formation of a world view and understood by a particular community, as a determining factor for societal interactions and inter-relationships.

According to Kretzschmar (1995, 150) women in South Africa are oppressed internally and externally and that there is a structural and personal form of oppression. The external oppression can be marked by androcentrism, exclusion subjection.

South Africa is not homogenous in her cultural entities but it consists of many dimensional cultural differences. However, South African culture has undergone metamorphic changes and developments, this being affected by Western culture, to make it dynamic as it is to day. The philosophy and theology of Colonialism in its nature was oppressive to both men and women in South Africa.

South African culture is negatively affected and influenced by the Western societies and therefore it has some elements of importation of some alien cultural traits since it is dynamic in nature and character. My standpoint in the aspect of Western culture is that alien cultural traits should be carefully studied and analysed so that Africa retains the good aspects of outside cultures, and retain them. As South Africans we need to reject the oppressive and negative aspects of Western culture (even those which are African in origin) for as long as they hamper the cordial inter-human relationships and does not harmonise with the Word op God, especially the good news of Jesus Christ. It should be pointed out that factors that disregard women or men need to be reconsidered and re-evaluated in a proper perspective so that negative views can be discarded. We black South Africans are at a stage where our culture must be seriously re-taught back to us and sometimes whites who studied and did thorough research about our culture are going to teach us our own culture. South African history and heritage are better preserved and known in European museums than in South Africa. Yet I believe that no person can better define us than ourselves.

Over a long period of time the African people have evolved a way of life that enabled them to survive until now. The theological assumption is that such a way of life has been God-centered, since all life has the Creator as its sources. The colonial argument of

saying that Africans have had no religion, enabling them to be labelled as paganists, idolatrous, kaffirs and atheist does not make theological sense. So, Africans are religious people and were found as religious even before the arrival of European missionaries. They had their own type of religion with the belief in the supernatural being and transcendent powers with the ancestors in the centre as their worship.

We all agree that South African is not a homogeneous in her cultural entities, but it consists of many dimensions of cultural differences. We all agree that culture plays a very important part in developing theology in Africa. However, we believe various cultural and subcultures operate on our continent. We realise that the complexity and richness of African cultures require us to identify (as I pointed out) the positive aspects and harmful or negative cultural aspects. I believe that such identification of positive aspects of our culture will challenge our churches and society to express solidarity and thereby witness for the poor and the oppressed.

My intention is to thoroughly and systematically name which elements of our culture are oppressive especially on the side of women and how this affect women in and outside the church.

In South Africa, being black is synonymous with being oppressed and being exploited. For a woman it is to be restricted in one's movements, in one's speech, in one's worship, but still have the freedom to sing the Lord's Song (Jordan 1994:150). Black women are exploited and oppressed in and by their own communities. Jordan is of the opinion that no white woman knows the inhuman intentions of racial oppression (King 1994:151).

> So black women in South Africa have an added burden caused by the effects of exploitation and oppression. Black women are the lowest-paid workforce in South Africa. In boom times they are hired at low wages and fired during recession periods. They from seventy percent of the

> unemployed community. They have to cook, wash, clean in their own homes after a very hard day's work.

Women are always in the majority in as far as the church-going population is concerned, but are labelled as the weaker, subordinate, non-thinking people by their oppressed and exploited black men. In practical reality women are the fund raisers but they have little say in how those funds should be used. Women suffer terrible exclusion and restriction to certain areas (like the kitchen) not leadership positions.

In South Africa women experienced seeing their own children, husbands and brothers been jailed, but they resisted. Women were in the forefront during the struggle for liberation in South Africa but today if one checks the statistics of the decision-makers in the parliament, surprisingly they are in the minority if not only to colour the house of assembly. Women live in the face of demoralising, dehumanising conditions but they survived. This dehumanising situation is totally out of line with what God intended them to be at creation. The order and justice of God is over-trodden, for God gave dominion over all the earth to both male and female equally without discrimination and qualification, with no specific colour attached to it either. There is no liberative action of God in the Bible which is without the intervention of a woman. For example, God used Moses to deliver the people of Israel, but it was Moses' mother who defied Pharaoh's orders. Consequently she saved a child and eventually she saved the house of Israel. It is also wonderful to see how God so designed the body of the woman that it would bear Christ the liberator of the whole humankind. Thus the greatest event in the life of God's people was performed through an agent, a woman. We as men, need to reevaluate the legitimacy of the liberation claims, that we owe it from a woman without the physical and direct intervention of a man.

That is why Cone (King 1994:152) realises that any form of liberation that does not address itself to the emancipation of the whole person should be seriously challenged for

misrepresenting the concept of liberation. For no person can be free when part of that which gives you your humanity is in chains.

The idea of Jordan is not to violently wash away men or to subsume men, but to put both men and women in a theological and ecclesiastical interaction as equal partners in the worship of God. Her contention is that males must not dominate females and that women love men, otherwise the struggle will be difficult without this mutualism. This incorrect relationship must be corrected and put right in the black community. Jordan in King (1994:152) says: "Therefore we must use reconciliation together with repentance on the side of the oppressor and exploiter". This is the reconstructive statement at the end of this thesis: Reconciliation together with repentance between black male and black female takes place in a just fashion. Each one of us has to recognise that one is not the enemy of the other. Rather we must focus on the real enemy - racist classism.

Feminists and womanists must join forces to fight against their real enemy which is patriarchalism, male domination and various forms of classim. The two movements must see themselves as foes of the situation and that when they are united in a war against misrepresentatives and misinterpretations of women, they will conquer. Perhaps white feminists need to be reminded that they are oppressors and thus they cannot claim to be liberators or liberative if black women are still exploited. They can only be regarded as liberators if their charity begins with them, liberating other women than still to discriminate and marginalise black women. For as long as the tendency exists for white feminists to speak on behalf of women (black women), then their theology itself needs to be liberated and transformed. One cannot oppress and liberate at the same time (dibelegi diji). If they cause suffering to the black women, they are like white men and black men writing on the suffering of black women. Feminist theology need to reconstruct itself and perhaps look for a name that interprets what they are, than to assume that they are a liberation theology. If they oppress black women, they are conversely oppressing the products of their husbands and thus if they seek equality with

their husbands, the starting point is with the children of their husbands of which blacks form part of. I believe that their God is the very same God whom black people are worshipping. Perhaps they need to know the other side of this God than to think that God is what they think of him to be, a God of the suffering. Feminists need to be very sensitive about other oppressed people. Jesus says in Luke 4: "I have come to preach Good News to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives". The experience of women in South Africa tells them that the poor, the blind, the oppressed are women too, especially black women who are left with children to bring up, who are raped, abused and killed every day in South Africa. So, Jesus died for all of us and rose from the dead for all of us.

So far, the ground work has been prepared for women in South Africa for them to fight until they achieve justice from oppression.

King (1994:154), when Jordan was pregnant, some black students and black church members and male pastors refused to partake of a communion served by her, because they deemed her unclean. Here we have a clear oppression of women from within the church. For me to be pregnant means to celebrate God given womanhood.

7.2 African Culture

Many cultures are patriarchal in nature, be they black or white. Men and women are not seen as equal partners. According to Mpumlwana (1994:165) African culture, especially as interpreted today, prevents women from playing leadership roles in our society and church: culture is a repertoire of learned behaviour.

African culture has undergone a metamorphosis. Because of its dynamic element it has been influenced to an extent by Western culture which in my opinion must be reversed. In traditional African culture women were regarded as children of their husband without

any social rights except to bear children who in turn were not theirs. They were regarded as weaker than men in thinking capacity and physical strength, so that a man walks ahead of a woman to protect her when walking. Women must take this practice as weakening them and must refuse it as it makes them weak. They must revive the silenced power in them and believe they can protect themselves without the assistance of a man. One hears of powerful women in African history, for example Mmadinoge the queen of Madibong in Sekhukhueland, Mmankopodi Sekhukhune of the Bapedi at Mohlaletse, Kgoshigadi Thorometjane down at Phiring, Mmanchi Masemola at GaMarishana the first black woman religious martyr who died for her faith, but their importance is played down in the same manner in which women in the Bible are played down. In African religious tradition a woman, especially "Kgadi", an aunt, should be regarded with respect, because she plays a role of intermediate between the ancestors' spirits and the family.

Traditional laws, which are exclusive, are a threat to women. The idea of women being sold out in marriages make them to feel possessed and belonging to family other than her own family is a threat to women. They become nomads rather than settlers, owned rather than owners. Around them there is always a word of approval from the husband to expect and this robs them of independence and prevents them from being emancipated thinkers. At the same time, next to the husband there are the authoritative in-laws to control and monitor her in every activity. Even upon the death of her husband, the entire estate is controlled by the male members of the family. So, women are not free to act and to interact socially, religious, by politically and economically. Very often women are defined purely in terms of their relationships with husbands and fathers, amongst others. They don't own surnames. A woman remains under the perpetual tutelage of her parents.

The heavy work load upon the shoulders of women is another contributory factor towards their lack of freedom to worship. A man and a woman can go for worship together, but when they arrive at home, a woman is expected to do the kitchen and domestic work while the husband sits and waits for a plate of food while listening to music or watching

the television screen if not reading the newspaper. This is culture and a woman cannot ask a husband to help because she knows it is repugnant to customary laws and that the husband is going to feel negative about the request.

In South Africa, women are still suffering subjection. According to Kretzschmar (1995:152) subjection simply means that women have been repressed and forced to suffer humiliation and hardship. Many of the oppressions on women are imposed by fathers, husbands, traditional and cultural laws, employers and government officials.

Other women can also be oppressors of women, for example, where a woman takes another woman's husband into concubinage or marriage. Sometimes upon wedding ceremonies, a bride would be addressed by other elderly experienced women. Very often they would tell her not to say anything when the husband or the mother-in-law speaks (Sesi o i tholele ge mmatswale a bua).

South African women are oppressed by the fear of loss. A woman would discover that there is something going wrong in the family but she won't have courage to voice it out, especially when it affects the relationship with the husband because this may result in her expulsion from the family or being beaten. She fears further subjection or suffering. Consequently she submits and becomes powerless and weak. Women are sometimes afraid of being labelled as troublesome, especially in the work situation.

Nonetheless there are lots of African cultural practices that need to be reconstructed and to be made meaningful if we Africans are to maintain our important cultural heritage that are relevant to our present society. I personally feel that we are to choose from our cultural pot that which is tasty, for example, those elements which marginalise women and others must be repatriated as evil and not Godly since we believe that God is the creator of Africans. Once people exploit, discriminate against, and deprive women of their God-given status, in the name of culture, together with Mpumlwana I have problems

as a Christian and as African because I believe that I am more Christian when I am African. I begin to have problems and question the situation where men and husbands sexually abuse women in the name of culture and African traditional religion. Our culture has allowed men greater freedom to do anything and over-dominate women simply because of their sex. Time has come and the sun has risen for this freedom not to be enjoyed at the expense, of humiliation and suffering of women.

African men could sing "Viva" when people talk about racial discrimination and class exploitation, but they become down-hearted and suspicious if I talk and preach about sexism. They think African culture makes their sin legitimate and if they are Christians, they hide behind the Scriptural texts.

In original African Traditional Societies, women were respected and they enjoyed a very special status. For example, a King would be the child of a Queen and an anonymous father as long as the boy was borne by a queen. Warriors would not go out for war without the intervention of a woman who would sing out (Mokgoshi) Mlilizelo. Women played an important economic role by participating in farming. They were the farmers of the community, ritual ceremonies, rain ceremonies: they were the makers of rain (c.f. Queen Modjadji) and callers of rain.

Therefore Mpumlwana (1994:166) believes it is very un-African to regard women as useless children who are not capable of participating in any meaningful nation-building process. Women to my mind are mentors of the nation. They are the co-workers and partners of God in the creation process of bringing human beings on earth. Traditionally, African women had tremendous power. A woman would not cry out in the midnight without positive response by village men, (Chupjwa golola tsa dinaka dihlabane). It was after the influence of Western culture with its new Hellenized economic power relations influenced that has brought with it new gender-based power relations.

Africa has much to teach people of other cultures, but the way the situation is at the present moment, Africans will need a person from somewhere to come and teach them their culture which is so rich in Christianity. That person will be from European countries who have done thorough research on African culture. Women are invisible in the church and society and this situation needs to be improved and our societies need a drastic transformation. The churches must take the struggle against sexism very seriously. Our church people must not psychologically persecute those men and women who stand against the dehumanisation of women. Sometimes you feel disillusioned and threaten to give up, but the pain that Christ went through gives me hope and power to go on preaching the good news of a liberating God.

There is yet another problem and this is that of the tradition in South Africa. The ideology that ministry is the job for men is in itself a stumbling block for many women. I still remember when I as a Minister in Sekhukhueland congregation of the URC SA empowered my church council on how to conduct a burial service. Later on Mrs Alice Mogaladi of Tafelkop branch was once faced with a situation of conducting the funeral service. With the knowledge and training she had, she still felt she could not do it because she is a woman and that a woman could not do that in the presence of other men, especially ministers from other churches. She felt threatened by the idea that a woman is a minor and powerless to face men. She just felt small to do that. This is a chronic feeling of guilt. This is the role tradition plays to hamper women from acting and interacting freely in the church. She felt that a man was capable or qualified to do the job, because he was a male person. Women feel covered and satisfied by the male gender and not on their own. So the struggle against the traditional way of thinking has had wide repercusions. Some women meet opposition from the church, from other women, and from the community at large. For a very long time South Africa has not been the world of women, but women must be reminded of the role they must play in their own liberation. Liberation is something which one must bring by becoming personally and actively involved in the struggle. Women must come forward and express themselves and

their ideas, not wait for men to tell them to fight for their liberation. However, men will perpetuate patriarchy because it is in their advantage and they benefit from it, instead of taking women as friends, mothers and colleagues.

Kretzschmar (1995:156) feels that "all these patriarchal behaviours are implying that our sexuality is central to our humanity and that the integration of our personalities is an essential aspect of the human maturation process". As Grenz (1990:8) puts it "Our sexuality is a basic datum of our existence as individuals". This idea must be removed then we will taste the existence situation and feeling of equality and its peacefulness and justification. I agree with Kretzschmar (1995:158) and recommend that any steps towards liberation, empowerment and transformation require an analysis of self and society. Both women and men need to develop a consciousness of gender-related issues and the interplay between gender, race, culture and class. Analysis and critique must be aimed at discovering the truth about ourselves and our society for as Jesus promised, it is the truth that shall set us free (John 8:32).

There must be a systematic engagement with all laws, practices, and ideological apparatuses that uphold patriarchy. The church needs to articulate more distinctly and unequivocably the particular injustices that women have experienced under the apartheid regime and it needs to become more critical of its own response to such oppression, and of the way it creates the alternative community for men and women.

According to Covinden (1994:286), "there is great diversity and complexity of women's experience with respect to race and class, it is revealing to consider the plight of women in relation to apartheid and patriarchy". Therefore a church commission on Women and Gender in South Africa should be set up to study the various feminist and gender-sensitive issues that confront the church in its engagement with the state, to explore the way in which colonialism, apartheid, capitalism, and reformist politics are all underlined

by a patriarchal ideology. Apartheid has deliberately undermined black women. What we need is a thorough-going integrated analysis of power relations.

Patriarchy in South Africa is upheld by a network of laws, rules, traditions, and public, private and social structures including family, religious and educational structures. Women in all South African communities have been either the victims of traditional patriarchal customs or of the legacy of Colonialism and slavery.

In the pre-colonial period there was coherent communal and family life, and women, especially the aged, enjoyed security. Only with the evolution of a capitalist economy from a feudal and rural one significant changes in gender relations in rural areas were experienced.

As the African rural economy weakened, black men were forced to move to urban areas and most women remained in the rural areas without resources and means of survival for their families. A large number of women were and continue to be the sole supporters of their households. For example, there are many widows in South Africa who are maintaining their families. Sometimes it hurts to talk of heads of families and to attach this privilege to men and not to women. The question will arise, as to who is the head in the family without a husband. Perhaps we need to re-examine the language and stop to refer to the head of the family as referring to men. Women must refuse this kind of language because they are also, equally the heads of the families. Monna ke hlogo ya lapa! A man is the head of the family, what about a woman? This arouses pain in the heart of a woman who is carrying all the social, leagal, economic and religious responsibility in her household.

7.3 The Church and Women

King (1994:289), the church is a sign and hope of the alternative society in South Africa. When women, exposed to discrimination in different forms in the society at large, approach the church, what do they see? The church is male-dominated in structure in all visible activities. In its deliberations on the life of the church, and in decision making at local, regional or ring, diocesan, episcopal and provincial synods and inter-synods, there are more male representatives and delegates than women. This is a symbol of the fact that lay ministry, as well as the three levels of ordained ministry, is dominated by men.

The church is not really in touch with women's deepest needs. It does not encourage autonomy and a sense of dignity among women. The church is not absolved of women abuse. The church does not provide much-needed nurture and affirmation. Women, with the variety of experiences they are exposed to, may be either aggressive or passive, traditional or modern, confident or bewildered, and the church must provide a spiritual home for women. The church must provide a deepening, contemplative spirituality, in the quest for their peace of mind and spirit and the quest for their identity. Women long for homecoming, to their Holy Mother the church, to a place where there is love and acceptance and growth into full humanity.

A point to be noted is the fact that black females are in the minority in the theological fraternity and those few are not highly qualified. They are not all trained pastors. Many places in South Africa are not even aware that there is something like women theology in existence. And yet Black women in South Africa are involved at the grassroots developmental level of a theology from both our intellectual capacity as well as from our inner strength and from our gut feelings. For this reason Jordan (1994:154) says "we find that black feminist theology does not differentiate itself from liberating political tendencies. They all work together, for the political oppression and exploitation gave birth to black feminist/womanist theology".

Women in South Africa still have a greater struggle for survival. Black women in South Africa today know what it is like to nurse those injured in the streets as the struggle for liberation continued. They cared for children who are not the products of their own bodies. Many barren women are still continuing doing that by adopting the discarded children at the hospitals and children centres. Over the Television screens of South African Broadcast Corporation (SABC) we see women carrying their destroyed crippled children. We hear women crying to know who killed their children and at least to know where their children were secretly buried.

Discrimination against women, or their marginalisation in the church may threaten the unity that the churches enjoy in their solidarity against apartheid. If the church fought against the racial apartheid, it must now turn its hands and fight against women apartheid. Perhaps I need to mention that women must stand up and fight for their liberation as they did with apartheid. The liberation struggle is not over, for as long as there is still apartheid of any kind, that is, that of the oppression and marginalisation of women: then there is still something wrong with the concept of liberation. There are so many areas of concern in our community, that when people come to the church seeking comfort and sustenance, they are distressed to find it spending its time discussing women issues in the doubtful and negative manner.

Covinden (1994:290) states:

> The church is guilty of double standards. In many ways, alongside its valiant fight against apartheid, in its statements, ministries, justice and reconciliation work and solidarity campaigns, the church has continued its normal church life, appointing bishops, priests, archdeacons and archbishops. Many of those appointed to these church positions are chosen because of their ministry in our present political crisis - the church, in affirming them and their ministry, sends out an important signal to the Southern African world.

The church must be open to face the need of change in the patriarchal structure.

Women must begin to get involved in re-interpreting the Bible to find its deepest salvific and liberating significance for humanity as a whole. One important step women must take is to demythologise the patriarchal structure with all its implications.

As Oduyoye (1994:124) has stated it: "Women are very much concerned about the church, but the church is not so much concerned about women. Church women are the acknowledged backbone of the church's finances and upkeep. Yet they rarely serve on church boards and when they do more often than not they are to represent women's interests".

The church must try to redress the imbalances created by apartheid, for example, in the clerical appointments it makes. Both men and women were baptised in one and the same Holy Spirit which knows no gender. The Holy Spirit cannot deal with just one situation at a time. Surely there is room in the heart of Christ for all the world's pain and suffering, for all its just cause and priorities. Men must start enduring the pains of women as Christ bore their pain.

The point that is often forgotten is that the ministry of women is not there for itself, but for the enhancement of the church's mission to a broken and divided land. The view and idea that feminism and women theology is a bourgeois, Western import in Africa; that it is out of tune with the needs and aspirations of African women, should be critically examined especially in African Independent Church or Messianic Churches like ZCC.

Authentic Christianity must be fundamentally supportive of women's goals and, according to Carr (1988:1-2), women's critique of Christianity is in turn, a powerful and transforming grace in our time, calling women to authentic personhood, societies to

justice, and the church to faithfulness to its own transcendent truth, to the deepest meaning of its symbols, and the new experience of over half its faithful members.

The time has come that our oppressive language must give way to one more neutral and non-sexist. People should be addressed as 'persons' not men or women because when you say a person is a woman, you already want to say she is 'the other'. Terms like fathers and mothers must be substituted by 'parents' because fatherhood is connected and related with power and authority which makes by comparison less than that of a woman. The feeling that women can not do things better than men must be removed by giving women more chances to perform in public occasions like being the programme directors and to participate physically and directly during funerals. For example, to give a vote of thanks, putting the soil in the grave using spates in the mixing of adobe in building projects and mining which they often do. Perhaps I need to mention that women themselves are mentally paralysed by the patriarchal domination. I once announced after the reading of the funeral formula on one of the funerals in Sekhukhueland when Raisibe Mello was buried, that people must do the spade work, emphatically referring to women, but women were dumbfounded, amazed and terrified by my statement while men too were not comfortable with the statement. Women in South Africa must see their relationship to other oppressed groups and join hands in demanding liberation, justice and peace. The church can not possibly mediate the gospel to women without their full participation in its decision making and its ministry. The church is at present just artificially and superficially window dressing with few women who are never on equal representational standing with males.

Personal liberation and empowerment in Kretzschmar's approach must be developed simultaneously with genuine social transformation. Patriarchal attitudes need to be repented of and discarded, whilst patriarchal structures need to be dismantled. The government, economic sectors, churches, women's leagues must join forces to fight the oppression, suffering, abuse, and marginalisation of women in South Africa and Africa

at large. However, I believe that Feminists and Womanists can easily be reconciled if they are united in and on the cross of Jesus Christ their Saviour. Their different experiences and backgrounds are barriers which Jesus broke only if they are committed to him, will they reconciled. They must learn from each other and have mutual respect and mutual understanding and accept each other.

If South Africa as a rainbow nation believes in reconciliation between different people from Black and White cultural background, how impossible is it for feminists and womanists not to reconciled. I mean it has become politically possible. This is the question of cultural tolerance because their few differences emanate from their cultural background and experiences. After all, they both share many issues in common and as women not to reconcile is the symbol of sinfulness from one side or the other and rejection of the reconciliative effect and power of Jesus Christ's death on the cross. Feminists and womanists are the small section of South African Community which will not find it difficult to be reconciled in the name and under the blood of Jesus Christ in order to bring the full and complete gospel message of good news to people without racial and cultural barriers intruding.

Women must believe in themselves and have confidence in whatever they are doing. They must not oppress themselves and other women by thinking that they are powerless. This is a psychological problem and world view. They must liberate themselves from patriarchal thinking. They must not wait for males to define them but they must define themselves and tell the world who and what they are and what they are not. They must also initiate change in the society and formulate a developed women image as not different from the image of God. To think that women are weak and powerless is idolatry, that is, they make males their idols to worship. They must rather worship God on the same and equal footing with males than to think of coming or going to God through male persons. Sexual harassment which the country is experiencing is about power, privilege and control, not about sex. Sexual harassment is abuse of power. It is

about understanding of roles. If women are owners then they must take authority and develop the spirit of ownership as men did in the past when they owned power and authority. To be head of the family does not mean to be everything. After all, there are many women who, are the sole heads of families and we can imagine families without fathers without losing the name family. Many women are widows, others are unmarried but they own houses and their children are not different from children who still have their fathers.

I call upon women to realise that their struggle is about enhancing and empowering women to a status equal to those of their male counterparts, and not that of being above men. Women must not exaggerate the struggle by trying to remove the authority of husbands by replacing it with their power even where it is not necessary at the expense of their vigilant and responsible husbands. That would be the abuse of their rights and violation of the human rights of the husband which will cause conflicts within many marriages. If women are emancipated and socially and mentally liberated, women-related crimes will be minimised.

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