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A CRITIQUE OF THE USE OF THE "EXODUS" METAPHOR BY FEMINIST THEOLOGY

by

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INTRODUCTION

This paper presents a study of the Exodus tradition of the Hebrew Bible with a critique from the perspective of a Feminist Liberation theology. It is recognised that Liberation theologies in general have adopted the theme of Israel's Exodus from Egypt as a paradigm for liberation from the particular forms of oppression being addressed by that liberation perspective (for example, Black theology, Third World theology, Feminist theology). The appropriateness of such a use of the tradition is discussed for the broad category of Liberation theologies as well as for Feminist theology specifically.

We have chosen to view the Exodus tradition as a metaphor. The importance of a metaphorical approach to theology will be discussed in the first chapter. Briefly, we acknowledge that metaphor is an appropriate category for religious language, since it uses what is known in order to describe the unknown. This is most clear in descriptions of the divine: in the case of the Exodus metaphor God may be described as "the Liberator of the oppressed". Likewise, the Exodus narrative may be considered a metaphor of liberation. However, a metaphorical perspective reminds us that religious language is limited since a metaphor cannot be fully equated with the category being described. A further limitation is noted whereby a two-way relationship is established in metaphorical speech, so that the metaphor is given validity by that which it describes. From the point of view of Feminist theology, such limitations are profoundly important, since a refusal to recognise them results in irrelevance or idolatry. Our second and third chapters explore the use of the Exodus metaphor by Feminist Liberation theology and the limitations of the metaphor, respectively.

This paper is biased toward a literary rather than a historical-critical methodology in its discussion of the Exodus tradition. That is, the emphasis is

not on the historicity of the events, but rather on the way the story has functioned as a literary memory for Israel and now for Christianity. Some overlap will occur during our discussion since Liberation theology's use of the paradigm has at times been dependent upon the historical verification of the Liberation event of Exodus. However, the literary emphasis lessens the tendency to use the intrinsic sexism of biblical texts to legitimate the oppression of women. As we shall see in our final chapter, literary hermeneutics provide more potential for a liberative use of the Exodus metaphor than a historicist approach.

As will become clear in this paper, however, our consideration of the Exodus tradition is dominated by a **contextual** hermeneutic. Contextual interpretation places less emphasis on historical-critical methodology than on the question of whether the biblical narratives have relevance for the experience of oppression, and its analysis tends to be sociologically oriented with attention given to conflict in social relations such as class and gender; that is, the contexts of both the text and of our situation as readers gain prominence in its interpretation. The specific context and interest of this study is the liberation of women from the oppression of sexism.

CHAPTER ONE: METAPHORICAL THOUGHT IN FEMINIST THEOLOGY

1.1 The Linguistic Concept of Metaphor

In the realm of hermeneutics and linguistics much attention has been given to the linguistic category of metaphor.[1] For a general introduction to the issues we take up Paul Ricoeur's discussion in his essay, "Metaphor and Symbol" (1976).

Classical rhetoricians defined metaphor as "the application to a thing of a name that belongs to something else", the purpose of which being "either to fill a semantic lacuna in the lexical code or to ornament discourse and make it more pleasing" (Ricoeur, 1976:47-48). A primary purpose of rhetoric is persuasion and metaphor is thus one linguistic strategy which performs the function of making an idea attractive to an audience. According to classical rhetorical theory, since a metaphor substitutes literal word with figurative word, it does not actually furnish any new information about reality.

However, modern semantic theory brings this description of metaphor into question. Metaphor does not function at the word level only, but has to do with the semantics of a sentence. That is, the meaning of the whole sentence must be discovered, since its literal meaning is usually nonsensical. Metaphor may be described as a

> calculated error, which brings together things which do not go together and by means of this apparent misunderstanding it causes a

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[1] See in particular Max Black, Models and Metaphors (New York: Cornell University Press, 1962); Paul Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory (Fort Worth: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976), The Rule of Metaphor (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977); and Philip Wheelwright, The Burning Fountain (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968).

The use of metaphor specifically in Christian theology has been most recently promulgated by the work of Sallie McFague, Metaphorical Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982) and Models of God (London: SCM Press, 1987). McFague draws heavily upon Ian Ramsey, Religious Language (New York: Macmillan, 1963) and David Tracey, The Analogical Imagination (London: SCM Press, 1981).

> new, hitherto unnoticed, relation of meaning to spring up between the terms that previous systems of classification had ignored or not allowed (Ricoeur, 1976:51).

Thus, the power of metaphor is in the tension created rather than the substitution made. Metaphors cannot simply be translated by their literal meaning, since they themselves create meaning. Furthermore, metaphor is not simply ornamental, but "tells us something new about reality" (Ricoeur, 1976:53).

A "tension theory" of metaphor describes the process as a provision of a new or unconventional description of a known entity. The strength of metaphors lie in their ability to achieve assent and dissent at the same time, based on this tension. A metaphor "is" and "is not" like that which it describes (Ricoeur, 1976:68). Sallie McFague takes up this point in her assertion that "good metaphors shock, they bring unlikes together, they upset conventions, they involve tension, and they are implicitly revolutionary" (1982:17). It is possible, then, through repetition, to have "dead metaphors" where tension is lost and replaced with literalism. This McFague describes as the "danger of assimilation" where a "shocking, powerful metaphor becomes trite and accepted" (1982:41). Religious metaphors are especially prone to this, "since religious images - through tradition and ritual - seldom change and become accepted as ordinary language" (McFague, 1982:41).

Both Ricoeur and McFague discuss the extension of metaphor into "root metaphors" and "models". The main characteristic of a root metaphor is its potential for conceptual diversity. The relationship between the two parts is sufficiently complex to enable many connections. These characteristics enable some metaphors to develop into models: broader than metaphors but performing essentially the same function, that of "construing an imaginary object more accessible to

description as a more complex domain of reality whose properties correspond to the properties of the object" (Ricoeur, 1976:67).

McFague works with the Kantian position that metaphorical thought forms the basis for all learning, both conscious and unconscious. Something new is "learnt" when connected with something already known: "We cannot learn or understand except through connection, through association" (1982:33). This association may be described as "vehicle" and "tenor" where the vehicle is the filter or screen through which the object ("tenor") is seen (Richards, in McFague, 1982:38). When one begins to view reality from the metaphorical perspective, McFague asserts, one realises that one is

> permanently model-dependent, that there is no such thing as a value-free, neutral, direct route to reality and that if we are to have any knowledge of reality at all, it must be heavily dependent on models (1982:99).

Since metaphors, root metaphors and models provide explanations for unintelligible concepts, they aid in the understanding of reality as a whole. Religious models tend to be focussed on relationships rather than entities: the model of "father" for God, for example, deals with "a set of relationships that serve as an explanation of the way an unfamiliar phenomenon works in terms of the structure of a more familiar area" (McFague, 1982:102). In obedience to the rule of metaphorical tension, however, models are always only partial, even if appropriate. Thus we must be aware of the limitations of the use of metaphor in addition to its advantages. We shall address the problems and limitations of metaphorical language in the next two sections of this chapter.

1.2 The Use of Metaphor in Christian Theology

David Buttrick (1987:115) has pointed to a recent shift in theology from the "mighty acts of God" or "salvation history" approach of the middle of this century[2] toward a theology more interested in symbol.[3] Where mighty-acts-of-God theologians had attempted to present "objective" history as the vehicle for God's revelation, more recent hermeneuticians have rejected the possibility of pure objectivity, so that revelation is now considered in the realm of phenomenology. This emphasis in contemporary theology does not do away with history, since

> history is always history in social consciousness. In social consciousness events are interpreted in relation to given symbols, myths, models, rituals, and the like (Buttrick, 1987:115).

Further, Buttrick goes on to state, with such an approach:

> we may begin to view God not so much as an actor in history, but as a `symbol source' or `image giver' to human social consciousness. . . . The mighty acts of God may be viewed as a narrative structure in social consciousness, and Christ may be understood as a living symbol who transforms Christian social consciousness (1987:115-116).

Gottwald also refers to this shift in his discussion of the approaches to biblical studies over the past decades. He sees Biblical Theology and Existentialist methods, both attempting to synthesise religious and historical-critical perspectives on the bible, giving way to new literary and social science approaches. "Metaphorical theology" thus fits into this trend toward newer literary hermeneutical approaches, acknowledging that language constitutes

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[2] A good example is G. Ernest Wright's study: God Who Acts (1952), following such theologians as Gerhard von Rad who viewed the earliest expressions of Israel's faith to be "recitals of the saving acts of God" (Wright, 1952:70).

[3] Ricoeur's essay referred to above has outlined the essential connection between symbol and metaphor (see 1976:53-69). While we acknowledge that symbol speaks of a deeper linguistic structure than metaphor, for the purposes of this essay they will be considered essentially as dimensions of the same linguistic phenomenon.

"world-in-consciousness" (Buttrick, 1987:9) and metaphors, models and symbols may be drawn upon to name the conscious world.

Although McFague's metaphorical approach to theology explores the possibility of viewing all aspects of theology in metaphorical categories, she focusses specifically on the problem of God-language. McFague begins with the traditional Christian concept of God's transcendence in order to point out that all language for God is inadequate, and that the appropriate response is, in fact, silence. Yet "the Judeo-Christian tradition, more than any other religious traditions, has chosen not to remain silent" (1982:1). While this decision to speak human "words" about the "Word of God" has given rise to a significant problem, the problem which is the focus of McFague's book, her initial premise is not out of line with mainstream theology. Augustine has referred to human words for God as "inadequate, limping language"; Aquinas said his entire theological work was as "straw"; the Exodus tradition itself stands under the prohibition of images command (Exodus 20:2-5) as a reminder that words and images created by humans are not an adequate expression of the divine. This received practical expression in Jewish history whereby not even the divine name could be spoken, in an effort to preserve the transcendence of God.[4]

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[4] It is therefore interesting to note that McFague has been critiqued exactly for her failure to maintain the concept of transcendence in her proposed metaphors for God. Her later work, Models of God, has particularly come under criticism as she has tried to explore models which highlight characteristics of immanence. Her envisioning of the world through the metaphor of "God's body" (1987:60), for example, would be strongly opposed by Achtemeier who views such language as the loss of the "otherness" of God, and therefore "the ultimate idolatry" (1988:56). However, McFague could not be accused of attempting to revive a Goddess religion (c.f. the work of Carol Christ (1987) and other "radical" feminist theologians), but rather aims to counteract hierarchical-patriarchal models with those which "suggest a different vision of existence . . . mutuality, nurture, self-sacrifice, fidelity, and care for the oppressed and vulnerable" (1982:xi).

Thus, all language for God is metaphorical - the lens through which we view an unnameable reality, but a way to connect with that reality. McFague highlights an important aspect of metaphorical theory which was not touched upon in Ricoeur's 1976 essay. Both categories of metaphorical association, vehicle and tenor, are influenced or changed by being brought into relationship with the other. McFague states,

> This is a very important point for religious models because the human images that are chosen as metaphors for God gain in stature and take on divine qualities by being placed in an interactive relationship with the divine (1982:38).

God-talk is related to structures of human consciousness (c.f. Buttrick, 1987:116). Since this involves an awareness of ourselves in relation to others, we tend to construct analogies of God and ourselves in relationship. By necessity, then, models of God as Parent, Judge, King and so on work in two directions: if God is Parent, we are children; if God is Judge, we are being judged; if God is King, we are subjects. This two-way character of relational models holds dangers, which will be addressed below. It is understandable, however, that relational metaphors which have gained prominence in the Christian tradition are those roles and models with which we are most familiar: anthropomorphic images. Models of Lord, King and Father have taken root in Christian theology as ways of expressing our understanding of God. A wide variety of non-human images have also been used[5] though not with the same tenacity as these anthropomorphic images. This leads to two problems of religious metaphorical language which McFague addresses: the idolatry and irrelevance of religious language.

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[5] A by no means exhaustive list might include the following images: Word (Jn 1:1-4), Love (I Jn 4:7-12), Spirit/dove (Jn 4:24, Mt 3:16, Lk 3:2), Mother bear/lion/leopard (Hos 13:7-8), Mother eagle (Dt 32:11), Mother hen (Mt 23:37, Lk 13:34), Alpha and Omega (Rev 1:8), Rock/fortress/strength (Dt 32:4, Ps 18:1-3), Light/lamp (Ps 18:28, 27:1, I Jn 1:5), Dew (Hos 14:5), Bird (Ps 17:8, 57:1), Purifier/fire/soap (Mal 3:1-4), Song (Ex 15:1-2).

The problem of idolatry follows when biblical images are read literally. Rather than accepting the biblical text as "relative and pluralistic as are all other human products" (1982:4), the language of the bible is believed to be a "literal or realistic representation of God's nature" (1982:5). "But", says McFague, "literalism will not do . . . either to equate human words with divine reality or to see no relationship between them is inappropriate" (1982:7). McFague suggests that the appropriate understanding is that human words point to transcendent reality, and in so doing participate in it. This she calls "the `metaphorical' way" (1982:7).

The problem of irrelevance has been particularly addressed by feminist theologians. They present a three-fold critique. Firstly, it is important to acknowledge the essential connection between naming and existence. The world as we know it, including the world of religion, has been named by men, and therefore excludes the experience of women. This leads directly to a second critique: religious language in Western Christianity has been formulated and confined within a patriarchal culture, which has limited the dominant metaphors to ones which are exclusive of women. Thirdly, since metaphorical language uses human language to speak of the divine, the images which are chosen achieve legitimation and honour while, conversely, the images ignored are not legitimated. "The paucity of feminine imagery for God in the Judeo-Christian tradition means a lower self-image for women in that tradition . . .one of the functions, therefore, of religious language is `naming ourselves' as we `name' God" (McFague, 1987:10).[6]

[6] Although this critique has been a particular focus of Feminist theology, it is of relevance to other theologies such as Black and Third-world, since these groups also have been excluded from dominant images in religious language.

1.3 Limitations of Biblical Metaphors for God

A debate within Feminist theology revolves around the possibility of continuing to use the Bible as a source for relevant religious language. While there is an enormous variety of metaphors for God within the Bible, including some feminine images, Phyllis Bird claims that the Bible remains "a man's `book', where women appear for the most part simply as adjuncts of men, significant only in the context of men's activities" (1982:253). The feminine images for God which we do find, furthermore, are largely confined to the traditionally female characteristics implied in the role of mother (giving birth, nurturing, protecting).

Richard Coggins (1988) notes that the greatest concentration of female images for God occurs in the post-exilic literature, corresponding to theological universalisation on the one hand and greater confinement of Judaism, such as the prohibition of using the name of God, on the other. He writes,

> I have a great deal of sympathy with the attempts at `depatriarchalisation', and there are undoubtedly some parts of the text where that is possible. But they are limited, and it requires special pleading to suppose that they are in some way the most important texts. So inevitably many women scholars will be finding not a biblical golden age but a biblical age at least as bad as their own times (1988:16).

Mary Potter Engel, while welcoming the variety of images scripture does provide, warns against relying on scriptural authority alone to critique and expand our God-language. She believes such a commitment to scripture is not in itself sufficient to counter the dominant metaphor of the "monarchy of God as Father" (1982:154). McFague makes the same point in her later book, Models of God. The subtitle of the book: "Theology for an Ecological and Nuclear Age", indicates her concern to emphasise God-language which is appropriate **for our time**. This may

imply "experiment[ing] with new metaphors" (1987:57). In this McFague subordinates language to theological intention, rather than allowing the language of the Bible and traditional Judeo-Christian theology determine theology.

In his discussion of the prominence of relational metaphors in our God-talk, Buttrick acknowledges that "sinful social order is a perennial problem" (1987:118) causing a limitation upon all social relationships. God-talk must always be qualified by language of amplification ("how much more") or denial (God's ways are not our ways). Nevertheless, Buttrick states,

> In some historical eras, however, social roles may be so distorted as to render traditional images all but useless. Just because an image may be found on a page of the bible does not guarantee its perpetual usefulness. For example, the Bible does liken God to a warrior but, in an age of military muscle-flexing and hawkish Pentagon generals, the warrior image may mispreach the gospel (1987:118).[7]

Notable, however, is the commitment of some well-respected feminist writers to a preservation of biblical language. Again the concern is to separate human words from divine truth. Phyllis Trible, for example, presents her own dilemma as one committed to both biblical faith and the Women's Liberation Movement:

> I face a terrible dilemma. Choose ye this day whom you will serve: the God of the fathers or the God of sisterhood. If the God of the fathers, then the Bible supplies models for your slavery. If the God of sisterhood, then you must reject patriarchal religion and go forth without models to claim your freedom (1973:31).

Trible's work, however, affirms her belief in the **intention** of biblical faith as liberation and salvation for both sexes. She believes that the non-sexuality of Yahweh is attested to in the traditions and formulations of Old Testament faith.

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[7] Buttrick goes on to state that the norm by which all social-role imagery is to be judged is that of the crucified Christ (1987:118). A *theologia crucis* ought to correct all imagery of God which promotes power and dominance. Such a christological departure point, however, is not necessarily relevant to an Old Testament study.

For example, Yahweh's sexuality is denied when the writers insist on a separation from the fertility gods of the ancient Near East. In God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality (1978), Trible claims that Genesis 1:27 provides the key to God-talk, since the verse acts as a metaphor, with "male and female" the vehicle and "the image of God" the tenor. Although the texts are largely patriarchal, she argues, these key concepts, God's non-sexuality and male and female as metaphor for, not God, but the image of God; provide justification for the searching of scripture for female language for the deity. Therefore, by finding non-patriarchal traditions embedded in scripture, she claims that depatriarchalisation is a "hermeneutic operating within scripture itself" (1973:48). Interestingly, Trible also uses the phrase "for our day" in her insistence that it is necessary for us to perceive the depatriarchalisation principle operating in scripture.

As the focus of this paper is the Exodus tradition of the Old Testament, metaphors for God which are featured in that tradition will be examined for their appropriateness to its message of liberation (see below, section 3.3). We shall now explore the particular relevance of metaphor for a feminist hermeneutic.

1.4 Metaphor Shapes Consciousness - A Concern for Feminist Theology.

As has been previously stressed, an inherent problem in metaphorical language is its "interactive character . . . that is, the way in which the model and the modelled mutually influence each other" (McFague, 1982:147). Mary Daly succinctly expressed the problem for feminists: "If God is male, then the male is God" (1973:19). Since metaphors for God have been predominantly masculine, males have been understood as having God-like attributes. This took expression initially in the insistence on male monotheism of Judaism developing over-against pantheistic fertility cults (see Ruether, 1983:47-61), and then influentially in the Greek

philosophical dualism equating of maleness with spirit and femaleness with flesh (Ruether, 1983:78-80). By claiming that males are endowed with God-like qualities, but females are not, women have been excluded from full participation in the Christian religion. However, as the Hebrew Bible preceded Greek philosophy by some centuries, it is clear that language shapes consciousness outside of dualistic philosophical categories.

Dominant metaphors for God in the Old Testament are King, Warrior, Judge, Husband, Father, Master. Such metaphors embrace the important qualities of being relational and personal, and yet their patriarchal, hierarchical nature cannot be overlooked. As patriarchal images, they are limited to recognisably male societal roles,[8] and patriarchal and social class structures are also emphasised in their hierarchical nature. Given the mutual influence between model and modelled, a society within which such metaphors are dominant expressions for the deity will at the same time confirm and legitimate the human counterparts while diminishing the importance of societal roles which are not expressive of the deity. Within a patriarchal household, for example, the patriarch is "Master" and the rest of the household are in servile relationship to him. While speaking of God as a "Husband" and Israel as a faithless yet beloved wife (Hos 2) explores an important theological dimension; the natural reflection in the Israelite family results in the role of the husband being viewed as more worthy and therefore more responsible than that of the wife. The conception of God as Warrior is a powerful image speaking of the might and glory of Yahweh as a God of deliverance. But the role of warrior was confined in Israel to dominant class

[8] Deborah, described as a Judge and warrior, provides an exception to this rule. However, as Phyllis Bird points out, "far too little evidence survives about [her] to assess [her] actual position in Israelite society (1983:267). Notable also is that women are almost exclusively portrayed as wives and mothers, while God is never spoken of as a wife and only rarely given specific motherly characterisation.

males,[9] so the reflected glorification of the human role was extended only to that group. Women were given only a supportive role: singing the praises of mighty warriors and dancing before the army, and peasants are afforded no role in the biblical texts. These social dynamics, justified by conceptualisations of God, have been recognised by Rosemary Radford Ruether:

> Most images of God in religions are modelled after the ruling class of society. In biblical religion the image of God is that of patriarchal Father above the visible created world, who relates to Israel as his "wife" and "children" in the sense of creatures totally dependent on his will, owing him unquestioning obedience. This image allows the king and patriarchal class to relate to women, children, and servants through the same model of domination and dependency (1975:74-75).[10]

When we come to examine the metaphors for God in the Exodus tradition we will see that these characteristics are reflected. God is pictured as Warrior, Law-maker, Judge. Even when parental images suggesting immanence are used, such as the one who nurtures in the wilderness,[11] the overriding concept of an unapproachable, hidden God with whom Moses must continually mediate on behalf of the people of

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[9] Marvin Chaney states that the landowning class of the monarchy period of ancient Israel "derived their principle identity as warriors" (1987:61). Notable also is the fact that the early kings of Israel achieved their status due to their prowess as warriors.

[10] See George Caird (1980:178) for a further discussion of this process by which biblical images shape human reality.

[11] Trible in particular highlights the feminine imagery for God which "occurs repeatedly in the traditions of the Exodus and Wanderings" (1973:32). Her discussion is tempered by its reference to Yahweh assuming the "woman's role". When we pay attention to the interactive character of metaphorical language, we must take cognizance of the non-liberative function such language plays. Now the "woman's role" is cemented through deified legitimisation. This is not to deny the value of functions such as nurturing, feeding, clothing. The fault lies, rather, in the paucity of references to God performing such functions. As McFague states, ". . . women do not model God and, hence, do not become "named" by God. Their existence, unlike that of men, is not elevated and defined; they live, quite literally, in "no man's land" where their biological and traditional functions as wife, mother, sister, housekeeper, and so on have not received idealisation and standard setting as have men's functions as husband, father, brother, master" (1983:149).

Israel, presents rather a transcendent vision of a patriarchal father who is a provider, but whose anger is easily aroused.

On the basis of this very critique, McFague points to the danger of metaphors becoming established as "models" which exclude the possibility of embracing other models or which fails to recognise its own limits. The model of "God the Father", she suggests, has been attributed such a status which puts it in danger of being idolatrous. The fact that for some it has become a dominant model to the exclusion of others,[12] and for others its relevance has failed,[13] suggests that it is no longer adequate as a "root-metaphor" for Christianity.[14] She articulates the root-metaphor of the Bible as "a personal deity relating to the human and natural world as its creator and transformer" (1982:104). Elsewhere McFague speaks of the

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[12] Elizabeth Achtemeier, for example, claims the transcendence of God as the very reason why God may not be addressed with feminine terminology. She notes that God is never referred to as "mother" in the Bible, although she concedes that maternal characteristics are attributed to God. However, she argues, "if God is addressed in female terms, his holy otherness is lost sight of. If God is called Mother, the metaphor system of birthing, suckling, carrying in the womb comes into play; and the divine Mother is then portrayed as giving birth to creation. . . Yet if all things come out of the being of God, then all share ontologically in the divine . . . the holy otherness of God from creation is lost, and human beings have usurped the place of their creator" (1988:56).

[13] See, for example, Daly 1973:13-43.

[14] It is notable that much work has been done to reclaim Jesus' use of "Father" (particularly "Abba") in reference to God as a liberating and affirming model. Jesus' concept of father, it is argued, was expressive of maternal characteristics rather than "the stern, judgemental autocrat of the Jewish family" (McFague, 1982:171); alternatively, much is made of the fact that Jesus substituted a heavenly father to take precedence over any claim made by earthly fathers. "The norms of the patriarchal society were not denied, but they lost their absolute character and their immutability and were no longer a prison. Those who followed Jesus and became children of God were free, emancipated men and women" (Visser't Hooft, 1982:7). While accepting the probable legitimacy of these claims, the fact that the patriarchal character of fatherhood had taken over conceptualisations of God by the time of the New Testament epistles has served to powerfully counteract the implied freedom in Jesus' use of the model (see, for example, Heb 12:9 and the "Household codes" - Eph 6:1-4 and Col 3:20-21).

rule of God as a root-metaphor for Christianity (1982:146), and more broadly refers to "human liberation" as the root-metaphor where

> at its most profound level addresses human bondage to the conventions and expectations of the ways of the world in contrast to the freedom of life according to the way of God's new rule (1982:165).

McFague suggests that the problems of idolatry and irrelevance might be overcome by realising that in God-language metaphors function to describe "the relationship between God and human beings" rather than present a picture of God. A wide variety of images, both male and female, human and non-human, animate and inanimate in origin may thus be used to describe this relationship. In this case,

> The critical criterion is not whether the Bible and the tradition contain such metaphors, but whether they are appropriate ones in which to suggest dimensions of the new divine-human relationship intrinsic to this religious tradition (1982:167).

A metaphorical theology thus aims to "both [justify] dominant, founding metaphors as true but not literal and [discover] other appropriate dominant metaphors for which cultural, political and social reasons have been suppressed" (McFague, 1982:28). A metaphor such as "father" will naturally be included as one way to picture the divine-human relationship, but not to the exclusion of others. While the model of God the Father developed for good reasons, especially when viewed in terms of Jesus' use of the model, its growth into patriarchalism "is a serious perversion of Jesus' understanding of the father model and utterly opposed to the root-metaphor of Christianity, which is against all worldly hierarchies" (McFague, 1982:167).

We have seen in our discussion of the two-way relationship between metaphor and reality that metaphors on the one hand are descriptive of our experience. We move from known (for example, human relationships) to unknown (God) in order to express and define the reality in which we find ourselves (a relationship to a personal God). On the other hand, however, we must be aware of the influence of

the relationship in the opposite direction. In the identification between vehicle and tenor, vehicle takes on new power, shaping our consciousness. In other words, God serves as legitimiser of the relationship which has been used in the description of God. The danger of such a legitimisation is that it becomes exclusive, literalised, or, in McFague's terms, an idol. As such it resists critique.

The Exodus tradition may be viewed as a metaphor in the awareness that in addition to relational images there are models which emerge with our narrative consciousness - "stories" whose plots may either be shaped by social role models or "theological dramas - stories of rebellion and reconciliation, stories of old life and new life, stories of wandering and welcome" (Buttrick, 1987:118). Just as relational models must be critiqued by a feminist consciousness, so must "stories" which function as metaphor such as the Exodus narrative be reviewed carefully for their usefulness to our situation.

An essential task for theology, therefore, is the constant re-examination of metaphors to ensure their appropriateness. Those feminist theologians interested in preserving a link with the biblical literature will continue to lift out overlooked and forgotten metaphors which have a powerful (and, at times, shocking) message. However, there must additionally be a critique of existing metaphors, ensuring their continued usefulness.

From the perspective of a Feminist Liberation theology, this paper intends to perform this task with specific focus on the Exodus tradition as a metaphor for liberation. Does it continue to function powerfully, or has it lost appropriateness? Do the relational metaphors which undergird its God-talk require the critique of a modern social consciousness? Has the Exodus tradition become

so ingrained in consciousness that we are no longer aware of the non-liberative aspects of its message? Can it truly function as an affirmation of the full personhood of women? These are some of the questions which we will bring to the text. In the recognition that religious language, as all language, is metaphorical, we must allow ourselves to step backwards, questioning and critiquing the established symbols and models. As ways of interpreting reality, traditional religious metaphorical language may no longer have validity in our day.

Although the major focus of this paper will be a feminist critique, the fact that the Exodus tradition has been more widely subscribed to as a liberating metaphor will mean that it must be critiqued from other perspectives as well. Additionally, there will be a concentration in this paper on the image and role of women in particular within the tradition, but other aspects of the tradition require critical attention.[15]

1.5 Summary

The linguistic category of metaphor is an appropriate entry point for Feminist theology's use of the Hebrew scriptures. This statement is made in the recognition that religious language, as all language, is metaphorical: we are able to speak of the unknown by using that which is familiar. However, metaphorical language is also limited since it is always partial. That which is unknown (tenor) is both like and unlike that which explains it (vehicle).

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[15] The racial implications of the "Conquest" as the goal of the Exodus, for example, must be addressed by Liberation theologians who wish to uphold the Exodus tradition as a liberating paradigm. This is a particularly pertinent issue in a country which has upheld racist apartheid policy on the foundation of such traditions. Equally of interest at this time in South Africa's history is the theology of land which lies behind the promise to the wandering Israelites.

Important also is the recognition that a two-way relationship exists between vehicle and tenor: vehicle explains tenor but tenor can serve to legitimise vehicle. In religious language this gives rise to two dangers: the danger of idolatry and the danger of irrelevance. Feminist theologians must be particularly sensitive to these dangers as they utilise metaphor in the relating of God to our world and our day.

With such an understanding of the advantages and limitations of a metaphorical theological approach to the Hebrew bible, this paper will focus on the Exodus tradition, seeking to establish whether it may be effectively utilised as a metaphor for liberation in a Feminist Liberation theology. Our next chapter explores the ways in which the tradition has been used by feminist and other Liberation theologians.

CHAPTER TWO: THE USE OF THE EXODUS METAPHOR IN FEMINIST LIBERATION THEOLOGY

2.1 General Use of the Metaphor in Liberation Theology

2.1.1 Introduction

Feminist theology identifies itself within the larger category of Liberation theologies: theologies which "attempt to reflect on the experiences and meaning of the faith based on the commitment to abolish injustice and build a new society" (Gutiérrez, 1974:307). Such theologies may be identified by the following common features: a commitment to justice which is reflected in praxis (social and political); the acknowledgement that the starting point for theology must be the experience of oppression; identification of itself as being "on the side of the oppressed"; and the understanding that the Bible provides a foundation for this commitment as God is "revealed" as one who cares for and liberates the downtrodden and oppressed.

This latter statement has resulted in the Exodus tradition of the Old Testament as being a central metaphor for Liberation theology, since it portrays a God who heard the cries of an afflicted and oppressed group of slaves in Egypt and led them out of their oppression to a new land. Gustavo Gutiérrez' seminal work A Theology of Liberation does not deal extensively with the Exodus theme, but it nevertheless appears as a foundational event in the history of Israel. For Gutiérrez, liberation and salvation are inextricably linked, where the Exodus appears as a "historical-salvific fact . . . a political liberation through which Yahweh expresses his love for his people and the gift of total liberation is received" (1974:157). The historical event of the Exodus proclaims God as a Liberator, and the liberation of Israel from Egypt

> . . . a political action. It is the breaking away from a situation of despoliation and misery and the beginning of the construction of a just and fraternal society (Gutiérrez, 1974:155).

Gutiérrez also links the Exodus to the creation stories, which in their formulations throughout the Bible show that "creation and liberation from Egypt are but one salvific act" (1974:155). In the Exodus the Israelites were created the people of Yahweh. However, since the Exodus narrative speaks of a rejection of an oppressive social situation - the monarchy of Egypt - and the establishment of a "just society" based on egalitarian ideals, it adds an important element to the creation stories: "the need and the place for man's [sic] active participation in the building of society" (1974:158-159).

Later Liberation theologies have built upon Gutiérrez' work. The viewing of the Exodus as a foundational event in Israel's identity and faith and the justification for its continued use as a liberating metaphor has been widely accepted by Liberation theologians. In order to see how it has become an important symbol for Liberation theology, and to be aware of the particular aspects of the tradition which have been emphasised, we will review two major treatments of the Exodus theme in Liberation theology: that of J. Severino Croatto (1981) and George Pixley (1987), and then turn to a brief overview of its use in Black Liberation theology in South Africa.[1]

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[1] While our analysis will focus on "third-world" theologians, it is important to note that the Exodus theme has been regarded in a similar light by Western, "first-world" theologians who identify their work within the framework of Liberation theology. Important examples would be Robert McAfee Brown's essay on the Exodus theme (1984:33-48) and the collection of essays edited by Norman Gottwald under the title: The Bible and Liberation (1983). See especially the contribution of Walter Brueggemann (1983:307-333) which explores two dominant "trajectories" running through the Old Testament literature: the "Mosaic tradition", described as "a movement of protest which is situated among the disinherited and which articulates its theological vision in terms of a God who decisively intrudes, even against seemingly impenetrable institutions and orderings" (1983:308); and the "Davidic tradition" - "a movement of consolidation which is situated among the established and secure and which articulates its theological vision in terms of a God who faithfully abides and sustains on behalf of the present ordering" (1983:308-309). The description of the former shows that it is grounded in the Exodus narrative. Brueggemann suggests that elements of the Exodus narrative are common to other periods of Israel's history, since they are

2.1.2 Croatto

Croatto, an Argentinian Catholic theologian, views Liberation theology as a theology of the process of liberation, and not of achieved liberty. This becomes apparent in his treatment of the Exodus tradition as an event which has gained significance in the process of its recounting, and continues to function as a meaningful memory for those who are involved in a present-day process of liberation. Croatto works within "a hermeneutical circle" which moves between the text and the contemporary reader, in the awareness that the text of the Exodus has been continually re-interpreted for new situations, and these reinterpretations have become bound to the meaning of the text. The circular nature is seen in the affirmation that event interprets word and word interprets event.

The Exodus functions as a foundational event in the Bible because its "reservoir-of-meaning" (Croatto, 1981:2) is great enough for continual reinterpretation. For example, the Exodus event is later referred to in creational language (Is 44:21-24, 51:9-11, 54:5, Dt 32:6 etc).[2] "As important as origins are, the Hebrew world-view shifts them to another epicentre, the salvific event of the Exodus" (1981:13). The merging of the Passover with the event is another example where

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recorded as part of the "liberation trajectory" which continues throughout the Hebrew Bible.

Liberation theologians acknowledge a debt to European political theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann (see Gutiérrez, 1973:218), and it is notable that Moltmann also lifts out the Exodus paradigm as a central image (see Theology of Hope (1967:106-112,304). However, his analysis is critiqued by Liberation theologians as being too little grounded in the concrete event, and seemingly unaware of human participation in the liberation experience. As a theological symbol, the Exodus in Moltmann's work remains a valid symbol for a "theology of hope", but not for a "theology of liberation" (Fierro, 1983:474).

[2] See below, Chapter 4, for further discussion of how the Exodus metaphor is reused in the biblical tradition.

the meaning of the saving event is unfolded by later generations: "Even the `Passover´ of Christ is a continuation of the Exodus" (1981:23). That is, the Israelites themselves understood the Exodus event hermeneutically - "exploring" its meaning from the perspective of new situations (eg. Num 21:10-35, Ps 135:10-12). Both the tradition of the promise to Abraham preceding the event and the recounting of the event were later accounts reflecting upon the event itself.

> The Exodus is thus not the bald happening that took place around the thirteenth century BC, but rather represents the event as it was reflected upon, pondered, and explored by faith and grasped in all its projections. . . . The profundity does not consist in the historical phenomenon as it might be photographed or registered in a chronicle, but in its significance, which can be understood only at a distance (1981:14).

The continual reinterpretation of the Exodus at the biblical level suggests for Croatto that it is an uncompleted event, and invites contemporary prolongation by the application of its liberative message to the oppressed people of the Third World.

> It is perfectly possible that we might understand ourselves **from** the perspective of the biblical Exodus and, above all, that we might understand the Exodus **from** the vantage point of our situation as peoples in economic, political, social, or cultural `bondage´ (1981:15).

When dealing with the narrative itself, Croatto makes a number of parallels to contemporary situations of oppression. He finds the notion of Israel´s "broken spirit" (Ex 6:9) a significant memory of the internalisation of oppression by oppressed groups so that they see no way out and have no hope for change.[3] What is required is a conscientiser with a vocation of freedom. This role is played

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[3] See Freire, (1970:49-51). Note that we do have the tradition of the Israelites crying out to God embedded in speeches of Yahweh (Ex 3:7,9; 6:5). Croatto suggests that behind this tradition lies a historical process of conscientisation. In its present form, however, the "groans" and "cries" of the Israelites serve to emphasise divine initiative; to "dramatise the `presence´ of the liberator God" (Croatto, 1981:17).

by Moses in the Exodus story - the human action of conscientising and leading out the people is later attributed to a "divine plan". The actual event of liberation occurs as a result a clash of powers. In the Exodus account the oppressed people had no power to free themselves from the powerful Pharaoh, but were helped by a superior (divine) power. Croatto notes that "it would be ingenuous to hope that the same will happen today, in a literal form" (1981:22). Unwrapped from its "mythico-symbolic language that we now read in the book of Exodus" (1981:22), we could imagine that it was the "collective" power of a large number of conscientised people engaged in a common purpose which ensured the success of the Exodus. Nevertheless, the doubts of the Israelites at a sign of possible defeat (Ex 14:10-12) function as an important episode for Croatto, because

> the `conscientisation´ prior to a liberation process, and which sets it in motion, is never complete. Only the event itself reveals all its `meaning´. . . the redactor underscores . . . the sense of security that comes from the event (Ex 14:31) (1981:24).

By his emphasis of human involvement on the historical plane, Croatto does not intend to diminish the importance of the theological interpretation of the Exodus, but rather intends to allow it to speak meaningfully to liberation movements of today.

Croatto combines a historical and literary interpretation of the Exodus event. Along with most biblical scholars of this century he insists that the liberation from Egypt began as a political and social event rather than a spiritual happening. The Israelites were not being "saved from their sin", but from genocide resulting from the political threat that their numbers posed (Ex 1:7-14). Croatto´s literary focus views the Exodus event as open to re-reading by new situations, and therefore a paradigm for theology today. His analysis shows that the event must have a holistic focus: "God saves total human beings whose **human** fulfilment can be impeded not only by themselves (sin) but also by other human

beings who abuse their power or their social status" (1981:18). This observation has "grave hermeneutical consequences" (1981:18) for a re-reading of the text from the perspective of Liberation theology.

Echoing Gutiérrez, Croatto equates salvation and liberation, referring to the creeds found in the Old Testament (Deut 6:20-25, 26:5-11, Josh 24:2-13) as evidence that this was the understanding of Israel in their faith. For Croatto, then, God is "defined in terms of the Exodus, that is, as `liberator´" (1981:27).

2.1.3 Pixley

While most accounts of the Exodus tradition as a source for Liberation theology deal only with the first fifteen chapters of Exodus, Pixley has written a commentary of the whole book of Exodus under the subtitle "A Liberation Perspective". He views the legal material as integral to the liberating event of Exodus, providing as it does "foundations for a new society" (1987:118). It is apparent, however, that the event of the Exodus as recorded in the earlier chapters is the central focus of the commentary.

Pixley is even more enthusiastic than Gutiérrez and Croatto in his claim that the event and written account of the Exodus forms the basis of the Old Testament (1987:xiii). This claim is made in conscious opposition to a "liberal" exegesis which emphasised the prophets and their preaching of justice as the most valuable part of the Old Testament. Rather, Pixley suggests, we must view the prophetic sense of justice as having its material basis in the experience of the Exodus, since they "were sensitive to divine inspiration because they were part of a people who knew God as a liberator of the poor from the time of the Exodus" (1987:xiii).

The text of the book of Exodus is a compilation of a probable large number of redactions over approximately eight centuries (see Deist, 1986:93), but Pixley limits his analysis to four historical "moments" lying behind the text which leave traces of internal tensions (see 1987:xviii-xx). The first "moment" is the original account - no longer identifiable but forming the foundation for the others. Pixley hypothesises that a core group guided by the Levite Moses in the thirteenth century BCE was responsible for this account. The second level of the text which Pixley postulates is set at the time of peasant uprisings in Canaan (fourteenth to eleventh centuries BCE), when peasant "tribes" formed alliances, one of these being "Israel". The Levite group from Egypt were received into this alliance, and their Exodus tradition was read as a social revolution against the monarchical institutions of Canaan.[4] The third "moment" represents the first written accounts, and occurs at the time of the establishment of the Israelite monarchy. Exodus was re-read as a "liberation struggle" on a national level (Israel and Egypt) rather than a class struggle. Both the "Yahwist" and "Elohist" accounts occur at this level, with both emphasising national identity although the Elohist is critical of the institution of monarchy. This level is dated around the tenth to ninth centuries BCE. The final "moment" which Pixley identifies is the situation of Israel under the Persian empire. This being a time when they experienced no national independence, the identity of Israel was purely religious. This level promotes the exclusive divinity of Yahweh, and is often referred to by Pixley as the level at which a sacerdotal tradition functions. It may be dated to the fifth century BCE and is traditionally identified as the "Priestly" tradition. Pixley claims that these four levels "enable us to

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[4] See Mendenhall (1962) and especially the work of his student Gottwald (1979) who expanded Mendenhall's theory of Israel's origins amongst peasant uprisings in Canaanite city-states.

distinguish the most important ideological motifs that have shaped the account" (1981:xx).

Pixley moves amongst these levels of historical tradition throughout his commentary, showing how the various "moments" have affected the final literary rendering of the text. The final level, for example, with its sacerdotal aim, presents the Exodus event as being the full responsibility of God.[5] However, Pixley claims that the text itself alternates between the assertion that God and Moses liberated the Israelites. This, in Pixley's view, does not set up a contradiction, but rather shows that humans are necessary agents of God's action. The affirmation of the co-working of God and human agents both preserves the transcendence of the revolutionary tradition and justifies a modern-day equivalent:

> The goal of the revolution ["a land flowing with milk and honey"] has something transcendent about it, never to be fully attained - otherwise the revolution would cease to be a movement - but it is not metahistorical, it is not outside history - otherwise the revolution would lose its bearing, its course. . . . Today we can liken the land where milk and honey flow to the utopic goal of the kingdom of God, with the land of Canaan as its necessary mediation, socialism. To speak of the utopia without its concrete historical mediation would be merely to dream an empty dream; and to speak of the mediation as if it were the utopia would be to impose a straitjacket on the revolution in order to render it manipulable (1987:19).[6]

Pixley believes the traditions of the first two "moments" affirm the belief that God chooses to side with the oppressed. The introduction to the narrative (Ex 1:1-2:22) contrasts Pharaoh's "project of death" (1987:1) with those who are on

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[5] In fact Pixley, far more than Croatto, seeks to present viable historical explanations for the events surrounding the Exodus. The plagues, the numbers of Israelites leaving Egypt, the provisions in the wilderness, and, to an extent, the crossing of the Red Sea, are all given plausible explanations in the commentary.

[6] Pixley's use of the Exodus tradition as a paradigm for modern-day revolutionary struggles fails to take account of the original ideological nature of the tradition. See section 2.2 below for a discussion of this point.

the side of life (the midwives). The "measures of force" (1987:39) taken against Pharaoh (Ex 7:8-11:10) and the vehement attitude to the Canaanites (Ex 34:12-16) are further indications that God rejected monarchical, class-based society and opted instead to act on the side of the oppressed class. Even at the third level of the historical background to the text, that of the monarchy of Israel, the tradition preserves no affirmation of such leadership. Yahweh alone is affirmed as "king" over the people of Israel.[7]

Although the Exodus is viewed by Pixley as a revolutionary event with the aim of establishing a new, classless society, he recognises that the legal codes contained in the book of Exodus are influenced by the third level of redaction. They do not present a "cohesive account of the construction of the revolutionary society" (1987:118) since the history of the Exodus was not written as a revolutionary history, but written during the period of the monarchy in order to present the origins of the nation. Thus the affirmation of the Exodus as a class struggle does not really have validification in the texts:

> It was easier to present the account of the destruction of the old order in Egypt . . . than to relate the experiences of an emerging people in Canaan that rejected the class societies existing in the land (1987:118).

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[7] Pixley claims that "the reign of Yahweh was a basic building block in the revolutionary ideology of Israel's peasant movement, and that it was in the name of Yahweh's rule that Israel refused to install human rulers" (1987:97). He states that the metaphor of God as King took shape at the pre-monarchic level, and thus functioned as a critique of the Israelite monarchy (see 1987:97). It must be noted, however, that Israel's formation as a nation took place over-against cultures with monarchic ideology, and these must surely have influenced the way Israel came to understand itself in relation to its God. Further, while we accept Pixley's observation that kingship is not explicitly promoted in the Exodus narrative, his acknowledgement of a major redaction at the time of the Israelite monarchy questions his implication that the text is **anti**-monarchic. In fact, the veneration of Moses' leadership as supreme authority installed by God (eg. Ex 18:13-26) may well have functioned to legitimate the rule of the monarchy and priesthood at the later redactional level dated to the tenth century by Pixley. See below (chapter 3) for a critique of the hierarchical societal structure of the Exodus community which implicated metaphors for God in the narrative.

Nevertheless, notable is the mention of "rulers" and "chieftains" of Canaan and the surrounding nations who are dismayed by Yahweh´s action in the Song of the Sea (Ex 15:14-16). Pixley believes this to be evidence of an earlier interpretation of the Exodus as a class struggle (1987:96).

Pixley deals with the traditions of "murmurings" and rebellion in the wilderness as "counterrevolutionary threats" (1987:81), instigated because the construction of a "classless society" was unprecedented and fear and ignorance constantly threatened to undermine the liberation project. However, Pixley views this process as "faithful to the historical experience of all revolutions when it notes that the mere rejection of the old society and its oppressive structures is insufficient to consolidate a revolution" (1987:81). That the book of Exodus culminates in the presentation of laws and a constitution for a new society indicates that counterrevolution was part of the process, but not the end of the revolution. The goal of the Exodus revolution was not only "liberation from" but also "liberation to" a new land. The book of Exodus constantly points forward to this goal, giving a historical validity to what is often viewed as merely a religious event. Pixley continually stresses in his treatment of Exodus is that, unlike most modern revolutions, the texts clearly affirm that it occurred at the instigation of God. Nevertheless, Pixley suggests that contemporary popular struggles in Latin America may be able to identify with the Exodus as

> the revolutionary manual of a deeply religious peasant people . . . and the success of this reading will depend in part on the success of revolutions that today are finding their inspiration in the Christian faith (1987:120-121).

2.1.4 Black Theology in South Africa

Louise Kretzschmar´s review of Black theology in South Africa asserts that in Black theology´s concentration on the hope of liberation:

> . . . two biblical texts are given priority of place. These are the Exodus narrative in the Old Testament and Jesus´ quotation of Isaiah

> 61 in his `sermon' in the synagogue of Nazareth (Lk 4:18-19). Although it is primarily in the work of the Latin American thinkers that these two texts are expounded upon and regarded as normative paradigms of God's activity in the Bible (and of course in the contemporary situation), they also occur in South African Black Theology. Liberation, thus, is understood largely in terms of black people being set free from a situation of oppression (1986:80).

One such proponent of South African Black theology, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, refers to the Exodus theme as biblical evidence of God's concern for liberation. God heard the voice of suffering, "took the side of the slaves, the oppressed, the victims" (1983:71), and acted on behalf of the slaves in Egypt to bring them into liberation. This is done despite the "dehumanising slave mentality" (1983:71) which their oppression had caused. According to the Exodus story, liberation occurred despite the "responsibilities and difficulties of freedom" (1983:72) in the desert wanderings. While liberation theologians generally claim to move from the situation of oppression to the biblical text, Tutu's (albeit homiletical) treatment of Exodus is to move from the text to the situation. Thus he finds constant parallels between the subjects of the Exodus story and the black people of South Africa: people who believe themselves to be inferior, second-class beings; who are divided and disrespectful of one another (Tutu refers to the Israelite "informers" in Ex 2:13-15); who will bear and suffer the costly wilderness experience before reaching the promised land. The Exodus text thus acts as a paradigm of hope for a suffering people in South Africa.

In a more extensive treatment of the theme Tutu refers to the Exodus as "the most significant event" (1983:73) in the Old Testament. In statements reminiscent of Gutiérrez, Croatto and other Liberation Theologians, Tutu notes that the Exodus was viewed by the Israelites as "the founding event of their existence as a people . . . the paradigm for describing God's activity in human history" (1983:73), and the perspective from which even creation would be viewed. The

miraculous plagues cited in the Exodus narrative illustrate that this God was not only the Lord of history, but also the Lord of nature. Exodus also formed the hermeneutical key to the future, where Israel imagined its freedom from Exile as a second and greater Exodus (Is 52:2-6). Furthermore, Tutu stresses that the Exodus, for the Israelites, was materially based, with political and social dimensions as well as being a religious experience. The merging of covenant and legal traditions with the Exodus indicated that "The Exodus had to do with their whole lives - political, social, economic, personal, corporate - . . . comprehensive liberation" (1983:74). The Exodus perspective of liberation which pervades the whole of the Old Testament also forms an important theme in the New Testament, where many of the aspects of the Exodus are incorporated into the portrayal of Jesus and his ministry (1983:61-63,75). Thus, while there are many parallels between the Liberation theologies of Latin America and South Africa, the emphasis of Tutu and other black theologians in South Africa is on total liberation (Kretzschmar, 1986:80),[8] and support for this is found in the Exodus narrative.[9] The contextual emphasis of doing theology in a situation of oppression in both Latin America and South Africa necessitates this strong connection between liberation and justice. Malan points out that "the Exodus motif on its own is not enough" (1987:6) since the biblical narrative does not result in

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[8] See, for example, Allan Boesak (1977:20-22), who emphasises the internal justice of Israel's legal system as congruent with Yahweh's liberation attested to in the Exodus - the "liberating deed *par excellence*" (1977:20).

[9] In a critique of Tutu's approach, J. Loader makes a rather unfair comment regarding Tutu's use of scripture. He suggests that Tutu "argues for political, social, and economic liberation without any thorough use of the Bible, but he does find it necessary to say that the Bible supports his view" (1986:155-156). However, this statement relates to one brief essay in a volume of sermons and speeches (1986:67-69), while other essays in the same volume give a much broader scriptural basis (eg. 1983:73-78). As we have shown, Tutu's tendency is more often to start with the biblical narrative and from there move to an analysis of the situation. Black theology's use of Scripture has been critiqued at another level, as we shall see below, but Loader's comments must be viewed with appreciation for his lack of attention to the context of Tutu's essay.

lasting liberty, but rather portrays Israel as becoming a nationalistic, socio-economically corrupt monarchic state itself. Liberation theologies have thus taken the metaphor as a starting point, but have emphasised the holistic nature of liberation as requiring new structures.

2.2 Critique

The early liberation theologians such as Gutiérrez have been critiqued for their naive, biblicistic use of traditions including the Exodus narrative as the basis for their theology.[10] This has recently been restated by Loader, who notes that while Gutiérrez and others claimed support for their position by appealing to the texts, it is clear that the authority which is acting as the basis for the propositions is the situation of oppression (1986:151). While Liberation theologies must respond seriously to this accusation of a "biased" use of scripture, the premise that all interpretation of scripture is ideologically based remains an important foundation for Liberation theology. With this recognition, "the socio-political crisis of our times demands that theologians quite explicitly commit themselves to share in the ideological struggle for a just and free society" (Villa-Vicencio, 1981:7). The question remains, however, whether this commitment justifies a particularly naive use of the Bible. Mosala's specific critique will be noted below, but his statement in response to this issue is pertinent here:

> It is not enough to be existentially committed to the struggles of the oppressed and exploited people. One must also effect a theoretical break with the assumptions and perspectives of the dominant discourse of a stratified society (1989:39).

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[10] For example, Gottwald comments: "the biblical conceptual framework of much political theology, including liberation theology . . . , seems not to differ greatly from the biblical theology movement, although it reads the content and implications of `revelation in history' in a far more social and political manner" (1985:19-20).

Itumeleng Mosala believes that Black theology in South Africa has failed to be a truly liberating theology as it has been unable to free itself from its western, dominant-class roots. Mosala stresses that if a person's reading of the bible is framed by their history and culture, it is exactly for this reason that "traditional" theology has been unable to act as a liberating agent for oppressed groups. The critique is extended to show that even "radical" theologies which are bound to a Western history and culture are limited in their effect:

> Western social and political theologies have failed to become instruments of liberating praxis because they have been premised on the dominant and patriarchal class histories and cultures at the expense of the oppressed and women's histories and cultures (1989:4).

Black theology in South Africa, Mosala argues, has also failed to break free from this cultural and historical heritage. A biblical hermeneutic which has a discourse committed to the goals of the struggle but "draws its weapons of combat from the social class assumption with which these struggles are in conflict" is an "ambiguous" effort (Mosala, 1989:6).

Mosala's work critiques, in particular, South African theologians such as Tutu and Boesak for maintaining a commitment to a "Word of God" hermeneutic which claims that the bible remains the authority for the struggle because it is the "Word of God". Such a theology insists that the bible has a unified message, and liberation/black theologians would claim that this message is that God is on the side of the oppressed. Mosala uses a materialist hermeneutic to show that this interpretation of the bible is naive. The biblical text itself has encoded a struggle between different persons and groups which may be described as a class struggle within the historical transformation of Israel into a monarchic nation. Thus the notion of one unified message in the bible is belied by the nature of the bible itself - as a materialist analysis combined with historical-critical

analysis shows. The Bible "is made up of a multiplicity of varying and often contradictory traditions that are a function of both a long history over which they were produced and a variety of situations that produced them" (Mosala, 1989:29). We have already noted at least two major "trajectories" running through the Old Testament (Brueggemann, 1983:308-309; see footnote 1): while it is possible to find support for a notion of a God who liberates the oppressed the texts also witness to a hegemonic ruling class who used the traditions of Israel for its own end at a later level of redaction. The Exodus narrative itself has not escaped this process:

> The appropriation by the exile community in Babylon of the exodus story to express their yearning for freedom to return to Zion and rebuild the Davidic dynasty, for example, conceals the class and political differences between the first exodus and this second exodus . . . the ethos of the original exodus theology is incompatible with the ideology and culture implied in the struggle for the reconstruction of Zion and Jerusalem (Mosala, 1989:20).

Thus, an uncritical adoption of the metaphor of the Exodus by liberation theologies, including Black theology, which fails to take into account the class struggle, and indeed other struggles, behind the use of the tradition in the Old Testament itself ultimately fails as a liberating notion. It uses the weapons of the oppressor - the product of a dominant class legitimising itself in a stratified society - in order to free the oppressed, and as such opens itself to critique. Pixley's treatment of the Exodus tradition must be attacked at this point: he cannot maintain a position which claims an overall liberating message (levels one and two of the production of the text) when he is aware of the reworkings of the Exodus text itself according to the nationalistic and ideologically royalist Jahwist redactors on the one hand and the dominant-class exilic community on the other. A **critical** reading of the text cannot fail to see it as an ideological product, with the result that a claim that the bible is on the side of the oppressed cannot be upheld. Rather, a political reading of the bible provides greater support for "the hegemonic sectors of society . . . since

the texts of the Bible are themselves already cast in hegemonic codes" (Mosala, 1989:6).

We find this critique to be an important one, and one which will have a new relevance when being readdressed from the viewpoint of a feminist reading of the Exodus narrative.

2.3 The Use of the Exodus Metaphor in Feminist Liberation Theology

2.3.1 Introduction

Denise Ackermann suggests that Feminist theology has a place amongst contemporary liberation theologies emerging from the Third World as it recognises its situation of oppression and realises the need for liberation, since it also affirms that the "root-metaphor of Christianity is human liberation" (1988:15, c.f. McFague, 1982:164). Ackermann claims that the significant difference between Feminist theology and other Liberation theologies is that Feminist theology is done by those who are themselves "exploited" and not done on behalf of the oppressed. Since women everywhere are exploited "the context of Feminist theology is more universal than the class struggle of Liberation theology" (1985:37). One must counter this argument, however, with the acknowledgement that in many parts of the world women form part of an oppressor group (for example, white South African women), and may therefore be in the ambiguous situation of being oppressor and oppressed at once. Moreover, Black theology as a theology of Liberation would claim to be the product of an oppressed group. It is notable, however, that only recently has Black theology recognised its own marginalisation of women.

One must distinguish between "reformist" and "revolutionary" feminist theologians, since the former category assert that "liberation for women can occur within the Christian paradigm" (McFague, 1982:164) while the latter stream reject Christian symbols such as the bible as hopelessly patriarchial, and therefore unable to be used as a source for the liberation of women. Ackermann notes that the reformist approach

> offers Christian women the opportunity of affirming their biblical heritage because we realise that although Scripture deeply reflects the patriarchal society prevailing at the times in which it was written, its radical impulse is basically incompatible with patriarchy (1985:35).

Those feminist theologians, then, who wish to view the Bible as a valid source for their theology, have, along with other liberation theologies, turned to traditions such as the Exodus motif as exemplary of this "radical impulse".[11]

The words of Alfredo Fierro find assent amongst feminist theologians who wish to retain a liberating tradition while at the same time rejecting patriarchy as an oppressive system:

> The Exodus is a symbol of throwing off the yoke, breaking away from established institutions, and evincing the ability of a people to fashion or refashion a life for themselves. They throw off the suffocating convenience of their age-old situation, lured on by the enticements of a new promised land. The Exodus symbolises a theological grasp of history as the possibility for change and discontinuity, as malleable material in human hands, as a line of action based on the awareness that one has been liberated by God (1983:476).

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[11] As such, this approach of Feminist theology shares in the newer literary methods of structuralism and deconstruction, which find in all literature "undermining" voices which alter the character of the narrative once highlighted. See Culler (1983:86) for an introduction to the aims of structuralist methods. Also see below (chapter 4) for further discussion of the contribution these methods may make to Feminist theology.

Another point of connection between Feminist theology and other forms of Liberation theology is the insistence that liberation entails justice. Patriarchy may not be replaced by a new form of hierarchical authority which continues to subjugate both the human and non-human world. This is where Feminist theology in particular provides a necessary critique of wider Liberation theology, as well as an essential self-critique.[12] Dianne Bergant (1987:105) claims that values such as cooperation, interdependence, respect, compassion and mutuality ought to replace competition, exploitation and domination in a society which is governed by justice; and she finds these values to be embraced in the Exodus symbol. The Exodus functions as an "interpretive key" since "it stands in opposition to what is discriminatory and oppressive" (1987:106). Bergant deals with the problem of the patriarchal text[13] by asserting that "the meaning of the tradition is normative, not the form" (1987:106).

General statements regarding the Exodus tradition as a source for Feminist theology are occasionally made by feminist theologians. Phyllis Trible refers to the Exodus as a "compelling . . . theme of freedom from oppression" which "speaks forcefully to Women's Liberation" (1973:34). It links the God of Israel to an oppressed group who refuse to live in an unjust society. It is a story which shows that "liberation begins in the home of the oppressor" (1973:34). Trible

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[12] The "liberation" of white, dominant-class, first-world women at the expense of other women can no longer be claimed a "just" process. Similarly, the liberation of black South Africans will not be complete until both men and women experience equality.

[13] A feminist critique of the Exodus text, Bergant asserts, "sensitises us to language and imagery that explicitly insult, subtly minimise, or completely disregard women. It alerts us to situations in which women are relegated to tasks that are always subordinate and exclusively auxiliary. It challenges presuppositions that flow from an anthropology that is androcentric and misogynist" (1987:104).

also speaks of women as "nurturers" of the "revolution" where "women alone take the initiative which leads to deliverance" (1973:34).

Rosemary Radford Ruether views the Exodus as part of the "liberating prophetic-messianic tradition" running through the Bible. She writes:

> the Bible for the most part is written . . . from the standpoint of people who take the side of the disadvantaged . . . This inclines the Bible to a view of God as One who does not take the side of the powerful but who comes to vindicate the oppressed. . . the prophetic God who takes the side of the poor, drowns the horsemen of Pharaoh and leads the slaves out of Egypt is a God who undercuts the agenda of most of what has been identified as `religion´ (1979:309).

For Ruether, then, the Exodus can function as a metaphor for liberation from sexism as from other forms of oppression.[14]

Nevertheless, we do not find such complete treatment of the Exodus as a paradigm for female liberation (as, for example, Croatto´s Exodus) predominantly because it is a tradition embedded in a patriarchal, androcentric narrative. What is often found amongst feminist biblical scholars, however, is attention to **usable aspects** of the Exodus tradition. These include the roles and actions of key women in the narrative, the "feminine" imagery for God, and positive aspects of the Exodus legal code. As Trible states: "a patriarchal religion which creates and preserves such feminist traditions contains resources for overcoming patriarchy" (1973:34). It is these traditions which we will survey in sections 2.3.2 to 2.3.5.

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[14] We have already questioned the assumption that the bible is written from the perspective of the oppressed as naive; the critique of Liberation theology´s use of the bible applies equally to Ruether´s use of the bible as a Feminist Liberation theologian.

2.3.2 The Role of Miriam

The figure of Miriam is frequently appealed to in feminist studies as a central Old Testament character - a prophetess and a co-leader of the Israelites in the Exodus narrative. Indeed, Phyllis Trible states boldly: "If Moses be the archetype of the male prophetic tradition, Miriam leads the female" (1989:25). Rita Burns has produced an extensive study of the biblical portrait of Miriam, introducing Miriam as the "often-forgotten figure whom the Lord also sent" (1987:1) on the basis of a text in Micah in which Yahweh states "I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam" (Mic 6:4). Burns' book systematically treats the seven biblical texts in which Miriam is mentioned,[15] concluding that they almost consistently represent her as a leader in the Hebrew community. Exactly what form this leadership took, however, is difficult to determine (1987:122). Against many scholars who enthusiastically hold up Miriam's designation as a prophetess (Ex 15:20),[16] Burns concludes:

> my study of these texts shows that the best understanding of the `prophetess' designation in Ex 15:20 is to regard it as an anachronism. Miriam is never represented as doing anything which is characteristically prophetic (1987:122).

Burns does suggest the possibility of a priestly role being attributed to Miriam in her exegesis of Num 12:2-9 and her observation of the close connection Miriam has with Aaron in other texts, but again concludes that a firm statement on this position cannot be made. Nevertheless, the texts do witness to a firm tradition of Miriam's leadership in two spheres: as an official in the cult of Israel (Ex

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[15] Ex 15:20-21; Num 12:1-15, 20:1, 26:59; Dt 24:9; I Chron 5:29; Mic 6:4.

[16] See, for example, Trible, 1989:18, 25; Exum, 1985:82; Meyers, 1983:303; and Ruether, 1985:176. Trible in particular appeals to the Micah text as "prophecy acknowledg[ing] the full legitimacy of Miriam, its own ancestor, who was designated `the prophet' even before Moses" (1989:25). Note, however, the historical reservation of Phyllis Bird, who does not acknowledge Miriam's designation as "prophetess" in Ex 15:20 since "the meaning of the term for this early period is disputed" (1983:286n.76).

15:20-21) - additionally supported by her being related to Aaron; and as the mediator of God's word (Num 12:2-9).

> The dual aspect of Miriam's role might help to explain the textual position of her witness vis-à-vis Moses and Aaron. The biblical writers used kinship terminology to say that they regarded Miriam as a "colleague" of the other two religious leaders. The brothers-sister relationship denotes parallel status in the religious sphere (Burns, 1987:124).

Burns qualifies this assertion by noting that subsequent generations of biblical writers under the influence of greater religious institutionalisation were compelled to subordinate Miriam's authority to that of Moses (1987:124).

Other writers have stressed Miriam's importance as the composer of the "Song of the Sea" (Ex 15:1-18). Although the longer song is introduced as being sung by Moses, most scholars attribute the authorship of the poem to Miriam (Trible, 1989:34n.5). The superfluous second ending to the episode (Ex 15:19-21) has led scholars to conclude that it is the older and original account: "So tenacious was the tradition about Miriam that later editors could not eliminate it altogether" (Trible, 1989:19) despite the minimisation of Miriam at the expense of Moses. Trible finds evidence from this text and others speaking of women celebrating "with timbrels and dancing" (I Sam 18:6-7; Ps 68:25, 81:2, 149:3-4, 150:4; Jer 31:4) that Miriam was remembered "as the historical mother of the musical life of Israel" (1989:25). At the very least, the text of Exodus 15 indicates that women were taking part in cultic rituals (Gerstein, 1989:175-176).

At the canonical level of the narrative Miriam has an additional role to play in the Exodus account. Her designation as the sister of Moses in the Levitical genealogies (Num 26:59 and I Chron 5:29) implies that she is the unnamed sister who, along with Moses' mother and Pharaoh's daughter, preserves the life of the infant Moses (Ex 2:7).

2.3.3 The Roles of Women in Exodus 1-4

Female characters in the first two chapters of Exodus often draw attention by writers intending to highlight the importance of women. Their inclusion in the story is described as deliberate "irony" by Robert Lawton (1985:414). While Pharaoh seeks to control the increasing numbers of Hebrew slaves by killing male children but allowing females to live, it is women who "undo his plans" (1985:414). Others attribute even greater significance to the role of the midwives and the three women who ensure Moses' survival. Women are portrayed as acting independently, involved in civil disobedience against the ruling forces. Joanna Dewey states:

> Commentators generally ignore the crucial role that women played at the birth of Moses . . . on the whole [they] simply take the women in the story for granted. They consider it natural for women to be concerned with birth and children. Yet if we look at the story of the women directly, rather than simply as a prelude to the story of Moses and the Exodus, we find they are important in their own right and also have a theological significance (1976:64-65).

It is through the action of these women that a deliverer survives and is able to lead the Israelites out of Egypt.

> If God was later acting through Moses to deliver the people, then God first of all acted through these women to deliver the people. Women as well as men are God's agents of salvation and, in the story of the Exodus, God's first agents (Dewey, 1976:65).

Interesting also, from the perspective of a Liberation theology, is the observation of Bird that the portrayal of women in the role of mother "show no distinctions of social status" (1983:268). We see this in the fact that the wife and daughter of a Hebrew slave are joined in purpose with the daughter of Pharaoh in defying Pharaoh and caring for the child Moses.[17]

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[17] Athalya Brenner (1986) provides an interesting study of women in two "birth of the hero" biblical paradigms. She classifies the birth of Moses narrative in the category of stories involving two mothers who between them produce one hero. In contrast to a model which portrays the mothers in conflict (for example, Sarah and Hagar), Moses' story is an example of "model" a mother who "relinquishes her rights and claims concerning the infant in favour of the

The tradition of despoiling the Egyptians (Ex 3:21-22; c.f. Ex 11:2-3 and 12:35-36) has been described by George Coats as a central theme in the Exodus tradition (1968:450-457), and as such provides another significant role for women in the narrative. In contrast to later references to this tradition which speak of the despoiling by the Hebrews as a whole (Ex 11:2-3, 12:35-36, Ps 105:37), in the early part of the book of Exodus (3:21-22) the narrator focuses specifically on the despoiling of their Egyptian neighbours by Hebrew women. This tradition thus serves to further emphasise the important role that women play in the narrative at this point.

Another significant woman figure in the early part of the Exodus tradition is Zipporah, Moses' wife. She appears only occasionally in the narrative, but the pericope of Ex 4:24-26 has occasioned much attention.[18] C. Houtman notes that Zipporah's action of circumcision of her son is unique in the biblical literature as elsewhere women never perform the task. Houtman interprets the action taken as a symbolic circumcision of Moses in order to dedicate him for his appointed task as deliverer of Israel. The story serves to heighten tensions as the proposed deliverer finds himself in danger of his life. Thus a similar "decisive role" is attributed to Zipporah as we have seen with other women in the early part of the Exodus narrative:

> It is thanks to a woman's energetic action that the story of deliverance is not broken off in this crisis . . . Yahweh's attack had a purpose, or in any event, a clearly positive result: Moses has been circumcised and, consequently, is dedicated to his duty in a very special way . . . he is prepared all the better for the task which awaits him (Houtman, 1983:102).

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second . . . advanc[ing] the child's chances of survival and the eventual fulfilment of his destiny" (1986:268). In this paradigm, women are "seen as strong and constant characters, and the male role is kept to a skeletal minimum" (1986:273).

[18] See the bibliographical detail in Houtman's essay (1983).

Thus, women have an important role to play in the early part of the Exodus narrative. Lawton (1985:414) points to the irony of the narrative in which Pharaoh considers female infants less important than males, demanding only that male Hebrews be destroyed, when meanwhile it is due to the action and defiance of women that Pharaoh is ultimately beaten. Midwives disobeyed his command; his daughter conspired with defiant Hebrew women to save the infant who would ultimately undo his plans for subjugating the Hebrew slaves; women were responsible for ensuring that the Israelites left with Egyptian spoil as well as their lives; and Moses' wife Zipporah acted swiftly to save his life when endangered.

2.3.4 "Feminine" Imagery for God

Another "usable" piece of the Exodus tradition which has come into focus is the "feminine" designation of imagery portrayed by the metaphor of Yahweh as a nurturing, caring, providing deity during the wilderness wanderings. Carol Meyers asserts that the actions of providence and sustenance (eg. Ex 16:13-16, 17:1-7) are as much redemptive acts of Yahweh as the more prominent depiction of Yahweh the warrior ensuring the escape from Egypt (1983:304). This feminine imagery for Yahweh had also been highlighted by Trible. She concentrates on the narratives of the wanderings found in Numbers, showing that the language used in the text by implication depicts Yahweh as a deity who conceived, was pregnant, writhed in labour pains, brought forth a child, and nursed it (Num 11:12; 1973:32). Meyers takes this idea up in her statement:

> The redemptive acts of Yahweh, to be sure, are neither masculine nor feminine, but the working out of those actions involved the might

> that masculine imagery expresses and also the love and caring - even the giving of birth - that feminine imagery conveys (1983:304).[19]

Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza also uses feminine imagery to refer to Yahweh's role in the Exodus. She speaks of "Divine Wisdom" being "the leader on the way out of bondage in Egypt" (1989:11), though acknowledges that this tradition has been suppressed by traditional religion.

2.3.5 Positive Aspects of the Legal Tradition

A final area of the Exodus tradition which has come under scrutiny by feminist scholars is the positive aspects of the legal tradition embedded in the narrative. Within the admittedly discriminatory legal system of Israel one can still find some measure of egalitarianism as well as usable traditions. In the former category we see a concern in the Exodus code for oppressed groups. The concern for the stranger, widow and orphan (Ex 22:21-23) is a reminder of the situation which Israel had come from ("for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" - Ex 22:21b) and portrays Yahweh the law-giver as a protector of the weak. Bird (1983:264) notes the special significance of the command to honour both father and mother as it occurs in the Decalogue (Ex 20:12). This command recognises the equality of male and female in their role as parents, placing "the highest possible value on this role" (Bird, 1983:264). A similar egalitarianism may be found in other laws in the Exodus code where male and female are not distinguished in terms of compensation made to them for damage inflicted (Ex 21:26-32).

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[19] Note, however, the thesis of Darr (1987), whose analysis of the juxtaposition of warrior and birthing metaphors attributed to God in Is 42:10-17 shows that both metaphors - the Warrior God who works through the storm and the mother giving birth - are natural phenomena which are nevertheless full of power. In this poem the images serve to support and emphasise each other, rather than contrast as "masculine" and "feminine" "traits" as Meyers implies.

Finally, in relation to our primary task of viewing the Exodus tradition in terms of its usefulness as a metaphor, the solemn warning against the creation of images (Ex 20:4-6) serves to remind us of the ultimate "incomprehensibility" of God which results in all human images being less than satisfactory (c.f. Johnson, 1984:445). This command warns against the "idolisation" and "irrelevancy" of conceptualisations of God which are bound within a male-dominated culture, and which are held as authoritative and exclusive.

2.4 Summary

We have seen that the Exodus paradigm has been widely used in Liberation theologies, including Black theology and Feminist Liberation theology, as a metaphor for the intention of these theologies to bring oppressed peoples into freedom. These theologies argue that the God to whom Israel attributed this liberation is the same God who inspires the liberation struggle today. The biblical texts, especially the Exodus narrative, portray a God who is "on the side of the oppressed".

Feminist theology has tended to use the tradition in a more limited way than broader liberation theologies, recognising its essential patriarchal framework. Feminist scholars have thus focussed on "usable aspects" of the tradition in order to find resources for their particular struggle against sexism. These include the important role of women in selected parts of the narrative, the key figure of Miriam as a leader for the Exodus group, the narrative's witness to feminine aspects of God and the egalitarian laws embedded within the legal code.

Liberation theology has been critiqued for a naive and biased use of the Bible, including the Exodus narrative, by failing to appreciate the findings of critical

scholarship and simply adopting the narrative as liberative. In particular, the claim that the narrative is authoritative and exemplary of the rest of the biblical message as a witness to God's concern for the oppressed fails to take into account either the class struggles underlying the text as it stands or its co-optation by the dominant royalist ideology of monarchic and post-exilic Israel.

Similarly, Feminist theology's use of the Exodus metaphor for its own struggle has simply adopted aspects of the tradition without a critical consciousness of the ambiguity of its liberating message. We now turn to a critique of the narrative from a feminist perspective in order to ascertain whether Feminist theology's use of the Exodus tradition leads to liberation or further oppression.

CHAPTER THREE: LIMITATIONS OF THE EXODUS METAPHOR FOR FEMINIST THEOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Our previous chapter outlined some ways in which Feminist theology, in relation to the wider category of Liberation theologies, has interpreted the Exodus metaphor as a liberating paradigm. We have seen that aside from adopting the broad narrative as a paradigm for liberation from an oppressive situation, the tendency has been to highlight certain aspects of the tradition which affirm the critical principle of Feminist theology - "the promotion of the full humanity of women" (Ruether, 1983:18). In this chapter we propose to challenge the assumption that these aspects of the Exodus metaphor "promote the full humanity of women", and to highlight other aspects of the tradition which may be shown to effectively work against the critical principle of Feminist theology. At the conclusion of this chapter we will summarise these findings under an analysis of the hermeneutical problems which have dominated an uncritical use of the Exodus metaphor by Feminist theology.

3.2 The Role of Women in the Narrative

Much attention has been focussed on the essential role of women in the early part of the Exodus narrative, with the conclusion that the Exodus could not have taken place without their decisive action in defiance of Pharaoh (the midwives) and on behalf of Moses the infant (Pharaoh's daughter, Moses' mother and sister), and later Moses the adult (Zipporah).

While it is true that these women play a critical role in the narrative, it is necessary to recognise their primary purpose in the story. As it stands, the early part of the Exodus narrative has been redacted to bring the focus of

attention entirely upon the person of Moses. The decree of Pharaoh that all male Hebrew children are to be killed (Ex 1:16) already creates a tension so that at his introduction (Ex 2:1) it is upon the survival of Moses that the reader's attention is placed. Indeed, the verse with its sequential announcement of the marriage of a descendant of Levi and a Levite woman immediately followed by the conception and birth of Moses implies that Moses was the firstborn of this couple. The "sister" who appears later (Ex 2:4) thus comes as a surprise in the narrative, providing one is sensitive enough to notice the discrepancy.

The legendary form of this story of Moses' birth, threatened death and preservation is familiar from the ancient Near Eastern text of the legend of Sargon's birth in the third millennium BCE. It, too, speaks of a child who is exposed to death, hidden in a reed basket, rescued, and raised to royalty (see Pritchard, 1958:85-86). The adoption of such a motif from Babylonian myths by the redactors of the narrative functions as a hint "that this Levite child is destined to play an important role in the rescue of his people" (Pixley, 1987:7). It is the fate of Moses, then, already conceived of in terms of royalty, which predominates in the narrative of Exodus 2.

Phyllis Trible speaks of the necessity of "bringing Miriam out of the shadows" (1989:14), and this phrase could be applied also to other women in the early part of the Exodus narrative. Feminist approaches to the Exodus narrative have certainly aimed to bring women out of the shadows. The question we must ask, however, is whether or not this is justifiable given the intention of the text. The women in Exodus 1-4 function only to highlight the importance of Moses, they surround him, protect him, nurture him and emphasise his centrality as a character in the narrative to the extent that few of the women are even named in the narrative. These women confirm Phyllis Bird's assertion that

> the roles played by women in [the historical] writings are almost exclusively subordinate and/or supporting roles. Women are adjuncts to men. They are the minor (occasionally major) characters necessary to a plot that revolves about males. They are the mothers and nurses and saviours of men . . . They are necessary to the drama, and may even steal the spotlight occasionally; but the story is rarely about them (1983:267).[1]

Thus Trible's claim, "Humanly speaking, the Exodus story owes its beginning not to Moses but to Miriam[2] and other women" (1989:18), can only be viewed as an exaggeration. The women's role is exactly that of supporting Moses, to which the Exodus story owes its beginning. Likewise, the narrative of Ex 4:24-26 functions to highlight Moses' call by Yahweh and to create tension by posing a further threat to his life. Zipporah's action, though swift and timely, does not serve to emphasise her as an individual of importance but to re-affirm Moses' position as the leader called by God - it is **Moses** who is "prepared all the better for the task which awaits him" (Houtman, 1983:102).

While stereotypical roles of women as mothers, nurturers and supporters of men nevertheless have value in any context, it is notable that the narrative also attributes to women the stereotypically negative role of manipulators who are forced to work behind the scene. Trible's comments fall into this trap, characterising the "power" of the women as their discretion, ability to negotiate and mediate (1989:18). It is this typical trait of women which preserves the child. Thus the claim "if Pharaoh had recognised the power of women he might well

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[1] While it may be argued that the books of Joshua and Judges offer some exceptions to this assertion, Bird suggests that the roles ascribed to prominent women in these narratives are either still described in relation to men (for example, Rahab the harlot, Josh 2 and 6), or "far too little evidence survives about them [for example, Deborah] to assess their actual position in Israelite society or their representativeness" (1983:267). Noteably, however, this is an argument based in historical analysis; at a literary level characters such as Deborah and Jezebel may indeed stand out as exceptional. The paucity of such characters must still be noted, however.

[2] Recalling that Trible interprets the "sister" of Moses of Ex 2:4 to be Miriam according to the genealogies of Num 26:59 and I Chron 5:29.

have reversed his decree and had daughters killed rather than sons" (Trible, 1989:18) is irrelevant, since such a scenario would never have existed.

Thus the position and roles of women in the early part of the Exodus narrative do no more than confirm women as the supporters, "helpers" and backdrop for the significant male characters Moses and Yahweh. Women are not yet liberated from their traditional roles.[3]

Pixley points to the first appearance of "God" in the narrative in connection with the midwives (Ex 1:17). His commentary, however, reflects the androcentricity of the text which does not introduce "Yahweh" properly as the God of Israel until the revelation to the adult Moses:

> It is in this incident that "God" appears for the first time, **albeit in a most modest role** - the midwives are "God-fearing", and God grants them descendants. But "God" is not yet specifically Yahweh, the God of Israel's forebears. The midwives, but their respect for life, demonstrate a reverence for a vague divinity (1987:5, my emphasis).

The authors of this narrative restrict the revelation and communication of God to significant male characters only: Moses and Aaron.[4] God relates to women in the narrative only indirectly. For example, in the narrative involving Zipporah (Ex 4:24-26), although she plays a significant role in preserving Moses' life, there

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[3] Significant also is the observation that in later Jewish literature dealing with the Exodus tradition, the roles of women in the story are even further diminished. Moses' father Amran, for example, becomes prominent in literature of the Second Temple period, being the dominant actor in defying Pharaoh, while he has no significant role in the canonical narrative (c.f. Biblical Antiquities 9:7). For further discussion, see Schuller (1989:178-194).

[4] Moreover, these males represented the whole of the community before God. This establishes a social hierarchy as well as a gender hierarchy in the relationship between God and the Israelites.

is no interaction between Zipporah and Yahweh through the incident.[5] Likewise, we look in vain for direct address to Miriam in the entire narrative, despite the implication that she was a leader along with Moses and Aaron. Outside of the book of Exodus, but within the tradition of the Exodus wanderings, we find only one instance of Yahweh addressing Miriam (Num 12:6-8), and it is in anger and judgement. Her punishment is allayed only through the intercession of the more significant male characters (see below). These observations again confirm the secondary importance of even the most significant female characters in the narrative of Exodus.

The narrative dealing with Miriam's punishment in Numbers 12 bears closer scrutiny as it is the longest text about Miriam in the scriptures, yet functions within a strict patriarchal framework. This text is often held up as evidence of Miriam's authority in the community as a prophetess - the complaint of Miriam and Aaron: "has the Lord not spoken with us as well?" (Num 12:2) being viewed as a confirmation of the designation of Miriam as a prophetess in Ex 15:20 (c.f. Trible, 1989:21). Trible rightly notes that the text deals with controversies about leadership and authority (1989:20), but the leadership appears to involve "priestly" rather than "prophetic" issues, specifically the "concerns of the Aaronic priests in their struggle with the Levites (represented in Num 12:2-9 by Moses) over the question of oracular authority" (Burns, 1987:67). Although details of the controversy over Moses' "Cushite wife" (Num 12:1) are unclear,

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[5] Admittedly, the conciseness of the narrative and the ambiguity of personal pronouns through the story render it an obscure passage which is difficult to interpret. Nevertheless, whether it is Moses or his son who is attacked by Yahweh, and whether Zipporah touches Moses or her son with the foreskin, no interaction is recorded between Zipporah and Yahweh. The version found in the Septuagint which has Zipporah falling at the feet and addressing the "angel of the Lord" provides the anticipated contact between Yahweh and Zipporah but must be considered secondary to the original intention of the narrative. See Houtman (1983) and Pixley (1987:29) for further discussion.

Burns upholds the probability that Miriam is acting as a public figure, voicing a public concern, possibly over the issue of the foreign status of Moses' wife (1987:70). Thus the controversy was one of priestly concern: the issue of cleanliness within the context of foreign marriages.

Regardless of the issue at stake, the complaint of Miriam and Aaron leads Fiorenza to conclude that Miriam did enjoy co-leadership privileges with Moses and Aaron, and that she actually competed with Moses for leadership (1976:51). Even if this were the case, the text as it stands clearly admonishes this claim and subordinates both Miriam and Aaron to Moses.[6] Moses is no ordinary leader, but the unique mediator between Yahweh and the Israelites (Num 12:7). Traditions of Moses' distribution of authority amongst the elders (Num 11, Ex 18) illustrate the overriding principle "that the oracular authority of others within the community receives its authenticity from the fact that it derives from Moses" (Burns, 1987:57).

Moreover, the punishment of leprosy which is brought upon Miriam alone, despite the support of Aaron in the controversy, is phrased in terms of the punishment of a rebellious daughter in a patriarchal family. Yahweh is clearly representing the patriarch when his response to her brothers' supplication for healing on her behalf reads as follows:

> Suppose her father had spat in her face, would she not have to remain in disgrace for seven days? Let her be kept for seven days in confinement outside the camp and then be brought back (Num 12:14).

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[6] Further, note the exclusive use of masculine pronouns in Yahweh's speech: "If there be a prophet among you, in a vision to **him** I make myself known; in a dream I speak with **him**" (Num 12:6, my emphasis). This serves grammatically to emphasise the falsity of any claim of Miriam's to leadership, especially of a prophetic kind.

Whether or not Miriam had access privileges to Yahweh at an earlier stage, this story removes any such relationship from her, leaving her in silence and dependent upon the mediation of men to represent her case: Aaron in supplication to Moses (Num 12:11), and Moses to the punishing God (Num 12:13). The story actually functions, then, to diminish Miriam and build up the authority of Moses:

> . . . the story cannot conceive of Miriam as an independent leader in Israel, but only as the jealous and rebellious sister of Moses with whom Yahweh deals as a patriarchal father would handle his uppity daughter. The story of Miriam's rebellion in its present form functions to repudiate Miriam's leadership claim and to extol Moses' superiority (Fiorenza, 1976:51).

Miriam's punishment is public (Burns, 1987:69) and the tradition gives rise to a negative rather than positive memory of her (c.f. Dt 24:9 - "Remember what the Lord your God did to Miriam on the way as you came forth out of Egypt"). Thus, any evidence for Miriam as a leader in the Exodus community has been tempered by a lengthy narrative which functions to throw doubt upon the legitimacy of her leadership, and at the very least to subordinate her role to that of Moses and Aaron, as indicated by the order of their names when named together in the text (Num 12:4, 26:59; I Chron 5:29; Mic 6:4[7]).

3.3 Metaphors for God in the Exodus Narrative

Liberation theologians find the Exodus narrative witnessing to a God who is the liberator of the oppressed. This central metaphor, they argue, depicts a God who

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[7] Somewhat surprisingly, Trible states that in the context of Num 12 the ordering of the names of Moses, Aaron and Miriam in 12:4 "hints at the diminution of Miriam" (1989:21) yet later claims that the same order in the Micah text points to the equality of the three: "a trinity of leadership" (1989:25). Trible's concern to "bring Miriam out of the shadows", however, is balanced by a recognition of the redactive processes which have formed a "vendetta" against her character: "If reasons for the attack are difficult to discern, the threat that she represented to the cultic establishment is abundantly evident. And that threat testifies to her prominence, power and prestige in early Israel" (1989:23).
Our analysis questions this conclusion reached by Trible.

cares for the weak and downtrodden, who stands for justice and an egalitarian society.

Our discussion at this point is guided by three questions. Firstly, does this metaphor of God as liberator serve as a liberating metaphor for Feminist theology also? Secondly, is it the "root-metaphor" of the narrative or are there other dominant pictures of God which emerge? Thirdly, do the other metaphors for God in the narrative provide a useful way of talking about God from the point of view of a modern feminist consciousness?

The critical starting point for a Feminist Liberation theology is the experience of oppression of women. The shape which liberation from such oppression takes must be defined by certain parameters: perhaps adequately summed up in the aim of the "promotion of the full humanity of women" (Ruether, 1983:18). The Exodus narrative, as we have seen, speaks to dimensions of human experience which do not necessarily meet this criterion. There is some overlap between the goals of Feminist theology and the message of the Exodus, for example in the defence of God of the oppressed, the critique of dominant systems of power and their powerholders, and in the vision of an egalitarian society (c.f. Ruether, 1983:24). The goals and the reality do not necessarily coincide, however. The Exodus has been portrayed by Liberation theologians as liberation from socio-political and economic oppression, but within the new egalitarian community women are still subordinated to men in patriarchal structures. This is clearly seen by an analysis of the roles attributed to women in the narrative, and by the legal code which Pixley refers to as "foundations for a new society" (1987:118).[8]

[8] See section 3.4.

Embedded within our first question is the question of the way Yahweh as liberator is portrayed. The strongest image coming out of the narrative is that of Yahweh as "Warrior". Liberation is achieved initially as a result of a series of divinely implemented plagues against Pharaoh and the Egyptians,[9] culminating in the death of the first born, but when the Israelites are actually on their way out of Egypt and Pharaoh changes his mind, it is the victory over Pharaoh at the Sea which ultimately achieves the liberation of the Israelites. This is stated explicitly by Josiah Young: "The drowning of Pharaoh's army . . . is the central liberating event of Exodus" (1987:93), and again: "Pharaoh's army drowned, and the Hebrew children knew that their God was the almighty God of liberation" (1987:94). Young, speaking as a representative of Black theology, acknowledges a less violent interpretation when he quotes Martin Luther King's assertion:

> The meaning of this story is not found in the drowning of the Egyptian soldiers, for no one should rejoice at the death or defeat of a human being. Rather, this story symbolises the death of evil and of inhuman oppression and unjust exploitation (quoted in 1987:96).

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[9] At this level the narrative presents a problem for the sensitive reader which, despite Childs' assertion that the motif of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart "has been constantly over-interpreted by supposing that it arose from a profoundly theological reflection" (1974:174) nevertheless raises the question of human responsibility and divine intervention. Deist (1986) deals with this question helpfully by pointing to the theological intention of each of the three major levels of redaction of the text (J, Dtr, P). In his view, J presents Yahweh's action as visible through natural events (the plagues) which every person, including non-Israelites, can easily see and thus are responsible for responding to this revelation. The Dtr redactor reminds his readers through the prophet that God has acted in the past and on the basis of this knowledge the people are to make a decision of obedience or disobedience, where continual stubborn disobedience will result in God hardening their heart. Once again, then, human responsibility is the primary explanation. Finally, P presents the most difficult picture of God for us to accept: a God who is interested only in the covenant people, and who brings the ruin of Pharaoh upon him, allowing for no measure of human responsibility. While it is helpful to note the differing strands of tradition within the one story, the authoritarian and often violent image of God which the narrative presents requires a greater critique, as we shall see below.

Nevertheless, Young adds: "for King and Black theologians, the drowning of Pharaoh symbolises the justice of God" (1987:96), betraying a continued commitment to the picture of a violent Warrior God.

Richard Nysse points out that the image of Yahweh as a Warrior is "central to many of the tenets of the Old Testament" (1987:193). He warns:

> If the Yahweh-as-a-Warrior theme is withdrawn, there would be considerable slippage in the Old Testament's (1) emphasis on freedom from oppression and the giftedness of Israel's existence; (2) conception of creation and the ongoing control of chaotic forces, both cosmic and historical; and (3) assertion of the reality of God's judgement of evil in the here and now as well as the future. These three areas would need to be grounded in a different or new metaphor if the Yahweh-as-a-Warrior theme is jettisoned (1987:193).

Nysse argues that this metaphor is an important one for the Old Testament's message of justice for the oppressed because it pictures a God who will fight on behalf of the oppressed against the strong who ignore justice. Although Israel's legal codes and prophetic pronouncements call for the community to protect the rights of the weak, there is much biblical evidence that the community failed in this respect, particularly as the nation became a stratified monarchic society. The hope of the poor, Nysse suggests, must then remain in a God who will turn against the victimiser. The message of the Exodus, that the Warrior God is on the side of the oppressed, remains valid for the community when it embraces within itself oppressed and oppressors.

Interestingly, Millard Lind, a writer from the pacifist Mennonite tradition, also argues for the maintenance of warrior language for Yahweh, but suggests that this precludes the necessity for Israel to engage in war:

> The uniqueness of the Exodus material . . . is that the Hebrew clans were not called to do battle in the usual sense of the word, but to respond to and trust in Yahweh as sole Warrior against the military might of Egypt (1980:170).

Moreover, Yahweh's victory is accomplished by miraculous means rather than military power. Lind argues that the rise to power of military leaders with the development of the monarchy of Israel was a travesty of the intention of the covenant God to establish a nation under the leadership of Yahweh as sole Warrior and sole King (c.f. 1980:171-172).

Feminist theology challenges this assertion of the necessity of maintaining warrior language for God. The challenge occurs on two levels. Firstly, a consciousness which is concerned to present a God in images which are relevant in an age threatened by nuclear and ecological disaster, the image of warrior exacerbates destruction, power, violence and domination, legitimising such traits as integral to a warrior model. Feminists would agree with Nysse's suggestion that the task is to discover new metaphors for such an age. This is the aim of Sallie McFague's book Models of God, where patriarchal, hierarchical images are replaced by those with "destabilising, inclusive, nonhierarchical vision" (1987:48), models with may speak "especially to the outcast and oppressed" (1987:48). The assumption that injustice can only be done away with by another form of injustice, namely the threat of violent, warrior-like intervention, is not necessarily founded.[10]

A second critique which may be brought to the assumption of the necessity of warrior imagery is based in the knowledge that metaphors have dual power: where

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[10] Admittedly, this problem becomes more ambiguous in a situation of revolutionary struggle in response to systematic oppression by a greater power. Carol Christ meets the challenge that her aversion to a Warrior metaphor arises from her privileged class and national position with the following statement: "I do not know what I would think if I were a poor woman living under an oppressive regime. I do believe that the horror of war, especially from the point of view of a woman who is likely to be raped by soldiers, is much greater than I can imagine. I am certain that oppressed women have a wide variety of feelings and views about the destruction wrought by war and whether or not their situations can be improved by violent revolution" (1987:80).

Yahweh is described as a god who acts like a human warrior, the language functions at the same time to raise the status of the warrior role. Patriarchal culture has "glorified warfare as a symbol of manhood and power" (Christ, 1987:75).[11] While in no way advocating the involvement of women in violent warfare as a means of achieving equality in such a society, it is an important observation that the Israelite community which viewed its beginnings as the result of direct intervention by a Warrior God would concurrently uphold male warriors as heroes and superior to both women and men who did not take part in military activity. The first monarchs of Israel, Saul and David, arose as warrior kings, and as a result of this the warrior role became a class determiner. Marvin Chaney notes that landowners as the "ruling class" in monarchic Israel would have "derived their principle identity as warriors" (1987:61). A telling phrase in Nahum 3:13 mocks at cowardly troops by referring to them as "women". We have already noted the role attributed to women at the Exodus event as being singing and dancing in praise of the successful Warrior God (Ex 15:20), and in later tradition we see a similar restriction of the woman's role, but now in honour of human warriors (I Sam 18:6-7). Thus, the veneration of the metaphor of Yahweh as Warrior as central to the Exodus tradition functions both to glorify the violent aspects of the liberation event and to ultimately legitimise an exclusively male metaphor for God. The God of the Exodus is conceived of in male terms and the masculine role of warrior is respected as "godlike".

[11] We may note that the figure of Deborah (Judg 4-5), although described primarily as judge and prophetess, may also be ascribed the role of warrior in her call to the men of Israel to enter into battle. Further, she accompanies Barak to the battlefield, if not to the battle itself. The presentation of Deborah, however, has been described as "enigmatic", "ironic" and "incongruous" (Klein, 1988:42,47,218n.15); such language underlines the unusual occurrence of a woman fulfilling such a role in biblical literature.

Feminist writers have attempted to balance the male-dominated metaphor of God as Warrior with the observation that Yahweh as the provider in the wilderness takes on distinctly feminine traits (Meyers, 1983:304, Trible, 1973:32; see above, section 2.3.4). In our opinion this suggestion fails to accurately interpret the picture given by the writers of the tradition. The God presented is indeed a provider of sustenance, but less in the nurturing sense of a nursing mother as Trible would postulate than in the sense of a stern, patriarchal father who "provides" for those dependent upon him. Trible makes much of the narrative of Num 11:10-15 in which Moses, in an angry outburst to Yahweh, uses mothering imagery, implying that it was Yahweh who conceived the people of Israel, gave birth to them, and nursed them as a wetnurse (c.f. 1978:68-69). The implication of Trible's analysis is that this metaphor pervades the entire tradition of the wilderness wanderings, describing God in predominantly feminine terms. However, Yahweh's provision of manna and quail (Ex 16) and water (Ex 17) is embedded within the tradition of the "murmurings" in the wilderness: traditions which portray Israel as ungrateful and forgetful of their miraculous liberation from Egypt, preferring to return to the "fleshpots" of Egypt (Ex 16:3); traditions in which the patience of both Moses and Yahweh is tried. Thus, provision is not made freely, as would a nursing mother, but as a result of the grumbling and threats of the Israelites against Moses (note the vindictiveness of the provision of meat in Num 11:18b-20 - "Therefore the Lord will give you meat, and you shall eat. You shall eat . . . a whole month, until it comes out at your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have rejected the Lord who is among you").

Moreover, in the Numbers account of the Wanderings this tradition is intimately tied to Yahweh's instructions for the establishment of hierarchical authority structures for the community; the patriarchal constraints necessitating the tying of authority to maleness (c.f. Num 11:16). This attention to authoritarianism

cannot be a resource for either a feminist consciousness or a Liberation theology which is reacting to imposed structural oppression. In this sense Pixley's analysis of the appointment of judges in Ex 18:19-27 is based more on preconceived notions of God's character from the earlier part of the narrative than the picture presented in this particular text. In a somewhat ambiguous explanation Pixley notes that the text presents Moses as "supreme authority", but that this betrayed no class stratification:

> we are not dealing with a class society like that of Egypt: Moses gains no advantage from the Israelites' labour, nor does he have the power to compel them to do forced labour. What we have here is a bureaucratic revolutionary organisation. It is revolutionary because it rejects a class society and seeks to implement the laws of Yahweh, who is a liberator God. It is bureaucratic, however, because in the administration of justice, power comes from the top down - from Moses as leader to those whom he appoints - not from the bottom up (1987:115).

We must question the possibility of maintaining egalitarian ideals in a society in which "power comes from the top down". Additionally, such a societal structure based on "the laws of Yahweh" maintains a concept of a God who is separated from all but the official channels of access. Exodus 33:11 is one of the few Old Testament texts which utilises the metaphor of "friend" for God, and is thus full of potential for a Feminist Liberation theology.[12] It restricts the relationship to Moses alone, however, functioning not to bring God closer to humanity but rather to elevate one human being above all others. The Exodus tradition throughout describes a God who is unable to be approached, who is hidden by cloud and fire, whose accessibility becomes even more restricted as a result of the legislation surrounding the construction and running of the Tabernacle as the official residence of God.

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[12] This metaphor is one of the "revolutionary" metaphors suggested by Sallie McFague as an appropriate replacement for the biblical root-metaphor of God as "Father". Although "friend" could be viewed as an inessential relationship, it allows for a greater equality and intentionality of relation while maintaining the possibility for dimensions such as salvation, transcendence and authority. See McFague, 1982:177-190.

A final metaphor for God which is prominent in the Exodus tradition is that of Yahweh as law-maker: the tradition taught that it was Yahweh who was responsible for the creation of Israel's legal code. Despite Pixley's assertion that the laws of the Exodus are "the norms of a new, classless society" (1987:121), with the decalogue at the centre as "the basic norms of a common life in a just society" (1987:158), the code in Exodus does not escape the inherent discrimination against women which can be seen in all legal traditions of the Hebrew bible. The establishment of Israel as a theocratic society did not serve to liberate women, but rather exacerbated their position of dependency. As Bird notes:

> The coincidence in Israel of these two male-oriented and male-dominated systems (the sociopolitical and the religious) created a double liability for women, enforcing upon them the status of dependents in the religious as well as the political and economic spheres (1983:260).

The legal position of women in Israel was that of a legal nonperson, since all legislation made the woman dependant upon her father or husband. The Exodus code refers once to the special protection to be afforded to widows (Ex 22:22), but multiple clauses in the Deuteronomic legal code in particular[13] attest to the precarious independence of the legal position of widowhood. The role of mother, we have noted above, is the exception in which a woman is not considered to be inferior to a man. Rather than viewing this as a commendable aspect of the legal code, however, one must critique the underlying assumption that the role of mother was the "essential function [of a woman] in the society" (Bird, 1983:264). No such counterpart role is considered to be primary, "essential" function for males in the society. The dominant metaphor of God as a law-maker, then, in the context of a discriminatory patriarchal legal system, functions to diminish women

[13] C.f. Dt 10:18, 14:29, 16:11,14, 24:19-21, 26:12-13, 27:19.

as less important in the consideration of a God who is otherwise held up as the instigator of just laws for an egalitarian society.

In summary, from the perspective of the oppression of women, the starting point of a Feminist Liberation theology, our analysis of the roles of women and the metaphors of God as portrayed by the Exodus tradition cannot support Young's statement that "Exodus is the clearest Old Testament example of both God's sensitivity to the oppressed and destruction of the oppressor" (1987:94). In the specific arena of the oppression of women, the patriarchal male represents the oppressor and the dependent woman the oppressed. Exodus neither liberates women from patriarchal societal structures nor ascribes to her non-traditional roles within the society. The dominant metaphors portraying the God of the Exodus are masculine in orientation, serving to diminish the roles women are afforded, and to enhance the roles of males in the society. Specifically, we have seen that the God who is identified as the Liberator from oppression takes on the roles of Warrior, patriarchal provider, law-maker; and that this God cannot be approached except via official channels of authority. Furthermore, this God legitimates a legal code which discriminates against women.

3.4 Hermeneutical Problems

In this section we propose to critique the hermeneutical approaches of those who have used the Exodus tradition as a liberating paradigm. We will apply the hermeneutical principles of Mosala's critique of Black theology in South Africa to the use that Feminist Liberation theology has made of the Exodus tradition as a metaphor for its own liberation. Additionally, however, we will critique the assumption a materialist hermeneutic such as that used by Mosala makes about pre-monarchic Israelite society as an idealised period of history in which

egalitarian principles reigned. From the perspective of the oppression of women this position must be questioned. This overview of the hermeneutical problems inherent in an attempt by Feminist Liberation theology to utilise the Exodus tradition will lead to the final chapter, an analysis of the possible approaches to the Exodus tradition from the perspective of Feminist theology.

In her assertion that the Exodus theme speaks forcefully to the liberation of women, Phyllis Trible states that the narrative shows "that **liberation begins in the home of the oppressor**" (1973:34, my emphasis). Such an assertion must be challenged by a similar perspective to that of Mosala's critique of Black theology in South Africa. He points to the ambiguity of a biblical hermeneutic which has a discourse committed to the goals of the struggle but "draws its weapons of combat from the social class assumption with which these struggles are in conflict" (1989:6). Mosala here picks up Gottwald's specific critique of the use of a "Word of God" hermeneutic which has its roots in dominant class, Western theology and not the "historical, cultural and ideological struggles of black people" (Mosala, 1989:6, c.f. Gottwald, 1985:16-17). By insisting that the bible is the Word of God, with a unified and unproblematic message of liberation, one is forced to overlook the struggles within the text itself, struggles which point to class conflicts and the hegemony of dominant-class ideology. Mosala argues that the naive assumption that the bible is above social, historical, cultural, gender, racial and ideological struggles exists even within the biblical communities themselves, where the ruling classes have controlled and co-opted the "discourses and stories of liberation of the ancient Israelite people" (1989:20). An outstanding example of this process, to which we have alluded already, can be found in the traditions of the "conquer" of Canaan. Notwithstanding the current consensus that the land was "conquered" from within as a result of an uprising of the peasant class of Canaan, the biblical narrative of the book of Joshua in

particular presents the events as an Exodus group entering the land which had been promised to them, and successfully taking over its resources by eradicating it of its former inhabitants. Such a history, written from the ideal perspective of the Davidic monarchy which had done all in its (human) power to extend its borders, by attributing its political success to a divine promise and intervention, both incorporates the original liberating paradigm of the Exodus narrative and legitimises any injustice which might be inferred by the taking over of the land from indigenous inhabitants. Thus early "liberating" traditions - a promise of nationhood and the freeing of slaves from oppression - were co-opted by the Davidic state to explain and justify the monarchic control of land and resources, as well as any maltreatment of non-Israelites.

We would argue that there are parallels to this process in Feminist theology's acceptance of patriarchy as its legitimate starting point in the biblical traditions. The assertion "liberation begins in the home of the oppressor" necessitates using the weapons of the oppressor - patriarchal language and traditions - as the instruments for liberation. Black theology's use of the biblical traditions for its own liberation struggle comes under criticism by those who just as validly would use it for their own position of privilege. In the same manner, Feminist theology's hermeneutical naivety must inevitably come under attack.

An example of such an attack is an essay by Moulder (1988) entitled "Why Feminist Theology Encourages Unbelief".[14] Moulder poses three questions to Feminist theology as a theology from the perspective of oppression which attacks the

[14] Quoted by James Cochrane (1990:3-17).

structures and processes of domination and proposes liberation as a Christian project. He asks:

> Does Yahweh have a good reason for not liberating women from their subordination of men? Does Yahweh encourage paternalism and subordination? And do advertisements for Yahweh express what their creators value and would like to have? (quoted in Cochrane, 1990:12).

The implications of these questions may validly be applied to a Black theological hermeneutic which views God as "on the side of the oppressed". The first question is that of theodicy - if Yahweh is the God of the oppressed, why is oppression still the dominant reality? In terms of gender oppression in particular, has biblical history not confirmed sexist structures of domination? Since God is represented in patriarchal and hierarchical images, is it possible to recover anything of an image of God who values autonomy or egalitarianism? And if metaphors for God are reflective of dominant socio-political structures, as we have argued, can we make firm claims about the partiality of God? (c.f. Cochrane, 1990:12). Phrased differently, is God on the side of the oppressed or on the side of Israel, and a nationalistic, patriarchal Israel at that, in the Hebrew bible?

Thus, it is possible to apply the critique of Mosala to the use which Feminist theology has made of the Exodus tradition, since feminist readings have used the oppressive patriarchal roots of the tradition despite being committed to a struggle against these structures. Women have been lauded for the essential role they played in the Exodus, but little cognizance has been taken of the fact that these roles were at best supportive and supplementary to the main character of Moses. Searches have been made for possible "feminine" aspects of the patriarchal God, with a resultant over-emphasis on what are ultimately minor traditions. Alternatively, Feminist theology has been forced to adopt the patriarchal cast of God-language, and co-opt it for its own struggle. The "Warrior" God is thus

seen as a liberative image by both women and men, despite the fact that women have no essential connection with this role.

Nevertheless, Feminist theology is faced with an additional challenge. Where Mosala is able to confirm that "glimpses of liberation" can be detected in the biblical texts, and that the task of Black theology is to develop "an adequate hermeneutical framework that can rescue those liberating themes from the biblical text" (1989:40), women must come to terms with the fact that even these "glimpses of liberation" are couched in traditions which are overcast by patriarchy. Thus, when Gottwald challenges Feminist theology to "see what parameters actually existed for a feminist movement" (Gottwald, 1979:797n.628) in the egalitarian intertribal Israel, such a search must be made under the knowledge that the "egalitarianism" of intertribal Israel itself did not exhibit any appreciable independent feminist consciousness of praxis. Gottwald's presumption of an "idealised" egalitarian society falls short at this point: that of egalitarianism which included the critical principle of the full humanity of women. Gottwald's advice is given "for feminists who wish to keep in continuity with their religious heritage" (1979:797n.628). Our analysis has shown, however, that it is virtually impossible to keep in continuity with the religious heritage of ancient Israel and find support for a modern feminist consciousness. Such traditions in the Old Testament texts can, at most, be symbolic for a contemporary struggle.

3.5 Summary

A number of problems arise when a critical analysis is made of the use of the Exodus metaphor as a liberating paradigm for Feminist theology. When the role of

women in the Exodus narrative is examined, we find that their primary function is to act as supporters and helpers of men, that is, to provide the backdrop for the central figure of Moses, and later Aaron. Further, significant women in the story have little direct access to God. While it is possible to find in the character of Miriam a historical early leader of Israel of that name, at the literary level of this narrative any claim to leadership is undermined by her constant submission to Moses and Aaron, and particularly by the public divine punishment afforded her for "rebellion" against God (Num 11). Upon examination, then, the women characters in the Exodus narrative as it stands struggle to rise above their traditional roles in patriarchal society.

The search for liberating metaphors for God in the text is likewise frustrated by the constraints of a text which has its roots in patriarchal society. Where feminist theologians have lauded the "Liberator" God of the Exodus, closer scrutiny of the dominant metaphors in the text indicate a lack of gender-inclusive, egalitarian models. The metaphor of God as Warrior, despite its connection with justice in the biblical texts, legitimises the violence of vengeance and warfare, and simultaneously affirms the predominantly male role of warrior as god-like. We have seen that God the Provider in the wilderness presents a picture of a stern patriarchal father, providing for rebellious children, rather than a caring, nurturing mother figure. God the Law-maker ironically paves the way for structural injustice through the establishment of social hierarchies of dominance.

Finally, our chapter examined the hermeneutical limitations inherent in the attempt to use an "oppressive" text for a liberating function. The affirmation of a text which itself fails to affirm the critical hermeneutical principle of Feminist theology is at best naive and at worst evidence of co-optation of

Feminist theology by dominant androgenous theologies. Thus, this chapter has shown that a traditional use of the Exodus text fails to adequately serve as a liberating metaphor for Feminist theology.

CHAPTER FOUR: AN ALTERNATIVE HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH TO THE EXODUS METAPHOR

4.1 Introduction

Our previous chapter has concluded that the Exodus story found in the biblical text has little to contribute to a modern feminist consciousness. Can it then be used at any level as a liberating metaphor for Feminist theology? The possible options to which our analysis has pointed are the use of the Exodus metaphor broadly as a paradigm of liberation, the emphasis of liberating aspects of the tradition despite its patriarchal cast, or the discarding of the metaphor as non-liberative for women. Each of these options are ultimately unsatisfactory for those theologians committed to both a feminist hermeneutic and the preservation of the biblical text, as we shall see below.

4.2 The Exodus Story as a Metaphor for Liberation

The first option is to adopt the tradition as a paradigm based on its broadest possible meaning as a story of liberation from an oppressive situation. Women may view themselves as an oppressed group, in bondage to an ideology which is not within God's will, and able to be led out of such a situation by the same God who was active on behalf of the Israelites who had been oppressed in Egypt. Using the metaphor in this way necessitates ignoring the many aspects of the tradition which do not affirm the full humanity of women. Principles such as "liberation" and "justice" which are affirmed by the Exodus account then become central, rather than details of the account itself. This is the approach of feminist theologians such as Rosemary Radford Ruether, as is obvious from her inclusion of the Exodus story in the "liberating prophetic-messianic tradition" running through the bible. Prophetic traditions, messianic traditions and Exodus tradition are all viewed from the perspective of a commitment to liberation, and

the critical details of the development of such traditions are subsumed to this perceived overriding principle. With such a perspective the Exodus itself loses significance as a tradition: it is only valuable in that it shares the aims and objectives of the liberating trajectory. The historical specificity of the story which is so important for Liberation theologies is lost when the story's value is preserved at such a general level.

4.3 "Liberating Fragments" of the Tradition

The second option revealed by our overview of Feminist theology's use of the Exodus metaphor has been the emphasis on "liberating fragments" in the text despite the patriarchal framework of the tradition. This option has the advantage of allowing the story as it stands to speak to the feminist consciousness, and yet it necessitates acceptance of the validity of the original patriarchally-biased tradition. The tradition is uncritically legitimated by virtue of the fact that embedded in it are aspects which challenge the dominant assumptions. Phyllis Trible's work is representative of this hermeneutical approach, described by Danna Nolan Fewell as a positive or "text-affirming" feminist reading, in which "she uncovers value systems in the work that have, for the most part, gone unrecognised" (1987:79).[1]

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[1] Fewell contrasts this approach with a negative or "text-resistant" feminist reading, which Fewell suggests is represented by Esther Fuchs: "the reader gets the impression that she [Fuchs] views the biblical narratives . . . to be patriarchal beyond redemption" (1987:80). Fewell argues, however, that "any reading that produces a text with complete thematic unity . . . is a misreading. We are called upon constantly to reread . . . we cannot naively accept positive feminist texts as unmediated words of liberation, neither can we reject negative patriarchal texts as unredeemable words of subjugation" (1987:82). Fewell's conclusions will be further discussed below.

As we have seen, however, many of these "liberating" aspects which have been highlighted are still trapped within the dominant patriarchal ideology. For example, an emphasis on the prominence of women in the opening chapters must recognise the fact that these women fulfil traditionally stereotyped feminine roles, and function to support, protect and build up the character of Moses rather than exist as characters in their own right. The role of Miriam may be deduced via historical-critical analysis as that of an important leader amongst the people of Israel, but the attention given to her in the literary account of the Exodus and wilderness wanderings is minimal, with the longest tradition involving her being an account of her punishment and humiliation. Thus, searching for aspects of the tradition which are liberative for a feminist consciousness begins to resemble a process of clutching at straws. Coggins' deflating but realistic conclusion may be requoted here: "there are undoubtedly some parts of the text where this [depatriachalisation] is possible . . . but it requires special pleading to suppose that they are in some way the most important texts" (1988:16).

Thus the second option of searching for liberative traditions in the text for women maintains a commitment to the text, but must compromise the starting point of Feminist theology by accepting that minimal affirmations of the full humanity of women are adequate for the text to be viewed as liberating.

A new literary approach which has been adopted by some feminist hermeneuticians, such as Fewell mentioned above, is that of "deconstruction". Based on an understanding that all texts contain elements which undermine the philosophy asserted in the text, together with the assumption that no reading is objective and value-free, deconstruction aims to "reread" texts from the perspective of, in this case, the value system of feminism. Where there are elements in the text

with which the value system of feminism relate, but which are low in priority in the value system of the literature, deconstruction passes judgement on the value system of the text; critiquing the "literary and political assumptions on which [the] reading has been based" (Culler, 1982:51). Fewell claims that such a deconstructuralist reading leads to transformation. This transformation

> . . . should include theological reflection and social change. For those of us who compare our worlds with biblical worlds and find both in need of redemption, we have a theological priority: we are not free to adopt any reading perspective that requires us to define ourselves in terms of division, competition, and separation . . . our task is to produce a closer reading, an inclusive reading, a compelling reading that allows for a sexually holistic view of human experience (Fewell, 1987:84-85).

Fewell believes deconstruction is permitted by the biblical literature which itself has many different points of view undermining dominant structures (c.f. 1987:82-83). While this highly critical approach to the biblical literature must be of interest to Feminist theology, deconstruction again involves "attention to the marginal . . . elements in a work or corpus that previous critics had thought unimportant" (Culler, 1982:215). Thus, despite the insistence that "undermining" elements are present in all discourse, this approach essentially fulfils the same function as the search for "liberating elements" in the Exodus story. Although the methods differ: Trible's "text-affirming" approach highlights useable aspects of the text, while a deconstructionist approach is text-critical in that it sees the text containing elements of its own destruction; in both cases the text as a whole must be examined for marginal, albeit "critical", elements in order to support the aims of Feminist theology.

4.4 A New Hermeneutic?

The fact that these options are ultimately unsatisfactory appear to lead us to the conclusion that the Exodus metaphor found in its present form must be

rejected as a paradigm for Feminist theology as the tradition does not go far enough in its affirmation of women. Before reaching this conclusion, however, it is important to step back and review the hermeneutical approach which has been taken so far. The attempt to remain true to the text has resulted in an acceptance of it as "objective", so that our interpretation of it is unrelated to our experience as twentieth century hermeneuticians with differing world-views to the creators of the text. If, then, we adopt a different hermeneutical starting point, our conclusions need not be so negative.

A hermeneutic which rejects an objective "authority" of the text would enable us to take into account the process of the text's production, and to utilise our own experience as a valid starting point for a dialogue with the text. In a sense, we may become equal partners with the text, so that its authority does not lie outside of this relationship, but is tested by our experience.

Such a hermeneutical approach may be exemplified by an essay by J. Severino Croatto, to whom we have previously referred. Croatto rejects the notion of theology as a "deposit", viewing it rather as a "production" (1983:140). Immediately we are reminded of Terry Eagleton's view of literature as "production" which Mosala has adopted in special reference to biblical literature. The term "production" indicates a continuous process, whereby the historical and cultural struggles of biblical communities are contained in the text. As "productions", texts are not simply representative of a single ideological stance, nor can biblical literature be seen to be counter-ideological where dominant ideology is confronted and challenged. By noting that the biblical text contains the struggles of culture and ideology, we may both acknowledge the presence of ideology in the text and use the internal struggle as legitimation for a critique of the dominant ideology. When applying this criteria to the text

containing the Exodus tradition, we note the various historical levels at which the tradition has provided legitimisation for dominant ideologies: the peasant uprisings of Canaanite city-states, the Davidic-Solomonic monarchy, the return of exiles from Babylon. The text reflects the struggle of these varying historical settings. The delineation of these historical/cultural struggles, including the dominant ideological conditions of the text, are part of the hermeneutical process.

However, the text's meaning does not remain limited to the historical background, once delineated. The fact that the text has continued as a production beyond particular historical settings suggests for Croatto that the text is "open", allowing the addressee to enter "with his or her own `world'" (1983:145). The "world" of the first author, listener and situation has changed in subsequent readings, a process known as "distanciation".[2] Croatto describes the "physical absence" of the original author, listener, and setting as "semantic wealth" (1983:144). The original "meaning" is not normative; rather, meaning grows with distance. When a new situation is brought to the text, the meaning of the foundational event is multiplied. Croatto refers to the "polysemy of a text" which is opened up in this process (1983:145). Bringing one's situation to the text is the process of "eisegesis": "One does not extract pure meaning `from' the text (which would be pure ex-egesis) . . . first you have to `get into' the text yourself, with questions the sacred authors never heard of" (Croatto, 1983:157-158). That is, in the commitment to a "hermeneutical circle" in which the praxis of faith contributes to the meaning of the text, reinterpretation is not merely "updating" the text but is a re-creation of the message of the bible (c.f. Croatto, 1987:70).

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[2] See Ricoeur's essay, "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation" (1981), for a full discussion of this concept.

This process can be seen in the biblical literature itself. Bernhard Anderson discusses the re-use of the Exodus tradition by Second Isaiah (1962:177-195), pointing out that the later author heightened and transposed the tradition so that it was not mere repetition of the first event: "in the repetition of this cultic legend through the ages, the tradition was given an ever new meaning, surpassing the original historical experiences" (1962:191). For example, where in the first Exodus the people were in fear and haste (Ex 12:11), the new Exodus (the return from Exile) for Second Isaiah was characterised by joy and peace (Is 52:12, 55:12). In the reworking of the tradition, Anderson notes, there is both continuity and discontinuity with the original event. Trible refers to this process as the "pilgrimage" of a text: "A single text appears in different versions with different functions in different contexts. . . . What it says on one occasion it denies on another. Thus, scripture in itself yields multiple interpretations of itself" (1978:4).

Croatto argues that with such a hermeneutic which sees a text as open to new meanings, the interpretation of a biblical text as a message of liberation and justice is legitimate, since it is merely "revealing dimensions previously unseen . . . saying the unsaid in what was said in another age" (1983:159). The determination of the original structure of the text by a well-to-do class, for example, does not limit the meaning of the text to such an ideology. An oppressed people can re-read the text from their situation, allowing that situation to be a critique of the biblical text as it stands.[3]

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[3] When acknowledging such re-interpretations, we must nevertheless be sensitive to the underlying cultic-ideological aims. This emphasis has only been applied recently. Mosala argues "while biblical scholars have always been aware of the tendency in biblical literature to use older traditions to address the needs of new situations . . . the issue has not been faced squarely [as to] what kind of additions they are" (1986:185-186, 195). For example, Second Isaiah, referred to above, is ideologically grounded in the "Davidic trajectory", thus

Croatto's approach thus fits with Mosala's insistence that the situation of the black working class and black women, the most oppressed groups in South Africa, must form the hermeneutical starting point for interpretation of biblical texts in that context. Since this starting point cannot coincide with an assumption that the biblical text is "unproblematically" the Word of God, that is, unreflective of inner tensions, the selected experience becomes an equally valid locus of authority for interpretation. We may compare this with Croatto's rejection of the Bible as a "`deposit' with a closed meaning" (1983:142). For both Mosala and Croatto, the new situation of oppression provides a challenge to a written tradition, and it is only in the dialogue between text and situation that new meaning can be found. The two authors differ, however, in that Croatto commits himself to viewing the Bible as "one text" with one kerygmatic axis, that of liberation or salvation,[4] while Mosala does not impose such an interpretation upon the text, but takes seriously the class character of the struggles within the biblical traditions.

Despite Mosala's implied criticism of Croatto's "one kerygmatic axis" as the authority basis of this biblical hermeneutic, Mosala himself tends to look for a basis of authority in a historically-reconstructed "core" of liberation. In this he follows Gottwald who assumes an original historically-verifiable

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supportive of the *status quo* rather than a liberative movement (see above: chapter 2, footnote 1).

[4] Such a commitment is typical of Liberation theologians, and has been seen amongst feminist theologians also (notably Ruether, see above). It contributes to the "mitte" debate of biblical theology, but is losing favour with new literary scholars who find the notion of one central theme too restrictive, given the variety of cultural and historical situations out of which texts have arisen. C.f. Gottwald's discussion of the breakdown of consensus in biblical studies since the late 1960s resulting from dissatisfaction with a contrived centre of meaning in the Bible (1985:19-20).

egalitarian society which becomes the measure by which later interpretations are gauged. These authors believe that it is possible to reconstruct such a society from the struggles in the text. Gottwald indicates this commitment in his comment on feminist research - he suggests that rather than searching for possible "feminine" aspects of "the overwhelming masculine deity of Israel" we should be looking

> to see what parameters actually existed for a feminist movement in the egalitarian intertribal Israel . . . contemporary feminism is a logical and necessary extension of the social egalitarian principle of early Israel, which itself did not exhibit any appreciable independent feminist consciousness of praxis (1979:797n.628).

However, we have seen that the concept of distanciation allows for a rejection of any basis of authority in the original situation of the text, whether it be a kerygmatic axis or a reconstructed egalitarian society. A feminist consciousness is neither legitimated by its congruity with a dominant biblical message of liberation nor by being perceived as an extension of an original egalitarianism, but is itself the authority for this hermeneutical approach of reinterpretation of a text, removed from its original setting, author and audience, for a new situation. The specific implications for Feminist theology's use of the Exodus metaphor must now be explored.

4.5 Implications for Feminist Theology

Firstly, and importantly, the experience of the oppression of women must continue to be the starting point for Feminist theology. Rather than implying a rejection of the biblical text as authoritative, however, this starting point allows for an interaction with the text as equal partners in dialogue. The text may challenge our situation as women, while simultaneously coming under critique by the new situation and being given new meaning by that new situation. This

contextual interpretation means that it is no longer necessary to find "liberating aspects" for women in the narrative in order to maintain the validity of the biblical text. With the understanding that the text gains new meaning as a new context is brought to it, and that this becomes part of the "reservoir-of-meaning" (Croatto, 1981:2), we are not limited to the presentation of events and characters in the original narrative. Thus the narrative is not legitimated in its present form merely by the discovery of "fragments" which affirm the liberation of women. Nor is it to be rejected as a metaphor, however, on the basis that the text does not contain "enough" which is liberating for women. The ability to dialogue with the text, rather than rejecting it outright, enables the continued use of the bible as a source for Christian Feminist theology. Thus Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza's claim:

> A feminist critical hermeneutics . . . not only has to claim the contemporary community of women struggling for liberation as its locus of revelation, it also must reclaim its foresisters as victims and subjects participating in patriarchal culture. It must do so not by creating a gynocentric life-centre on the fringes of androcentric culture and history, but by reclaiming such androcentric human and biblical history as women's own history (1983:29).

Fiorenza goes on to discuss the need for a "paradigm for biblical revelation that does not understand the New Testament as an archetype but as a prototype" where "an archetype is an ideal form that establishes an unchanging timeless pattern, [while] a prototype is not a binding timeless pattern or principle" (1983:33). This concept mirrors Croatto's hermeneutical model which views the text as open to new meaning brought by new situations; and could equally validly be applied to Old Testament texts such as the Exodus tradition. Since a prototype does not establish a timeless principle, it is "critically open to the possibility of its own transformation" (Fiorenza, 1983:33). We have seen how the Exodus metaphor became transformed with Israel's new experiences of exile and return. As a prototype tradition, then, it could serve as liberatory for Feminist theology as

it becomes transformed in alignment with the situation of the oppression of women.

The transformation of the formerly patriarchal text by a feminist consciousness may be described as a metaphorical act, whereby "unlikes" are brought together to create new meaning. Recalling McFague's definition of "good" metaphors as being those that involve tension (1982:17), we find that we are able to view the tension between the Exodus narrative in its present patriarchal form and the aims and objectives of Feminist theology in a positive light. The tension does not reduce the significance of either, but can function to emphasise the importance of reinterpretation from a new viewpoint. God's liberation of women "is like" the liberation attested to by the Exodus narrative, but it also "is not like" the tradition which cannot affirm the full humanity and equality of women. In this tension the "message" of both Feminist theology and the Exodus are given new significance.

A final implication of this hermeneutical approach for Feminist theology's use of the Exodus tradition insists that re-reading the text with a new consciousness and from the perspective of a new situation may mean transforming some aspects of the tradition. For example, we have critiqued the dominant metaphors for God in the tradition. The transformation of the Exodus from a feminist perspective may result in the creation of new metaphors for God. The feminist critique of the "warrior" metaphor (see above) necessitates a new metaphor for God as liberator which maintains the values of justice and liberation while promoting an image which has greater universal application to the whole people of God. Additionally, the metaphor must indicate a sensitivity to an ecofeminist consciousness, so that violence and destruction are not integrated within the image. Similarly, other

metaphors for God in the biblical Exodus narrative discussed above may be transformed by a feminist re-reading of the tradition.

Thus the Exodus metaphor may serve as a liberating metaphor for women within the limits of a hermeneutical approach which acknowledges the patriarchal nature of the original text, but views the text as prototype rather than archetype. As such, it remains open to the possibility of transformation with a new situation, namely the experience of the oppression of women. Such a re-reading of the text, however, must differ from Croatto's proposed contextual interpretation in the following way. Croatto works with an understanding of the bible as one text, with one kerygma of liberation or salvation. This, for him, justifies a re-reading of a text from such a perspective. Feminist theology, along with newer literary and sociological approaches to biblical study, recognises a variety of messages in the biblical texts. Their various backgrounds presuppose various degrees of "liberation" in the actual transmission. Specifically, from a feminist viewpoint, the liberation of women has not been a concern of biblical writers. Re-reading the text from that perspective, then, cannot be justified by an underlying commitment to the perspective. It must rather be legitimated by a commitment to a feminist consciousness. The source of authority is shifted, so that authority is shared between the situation of women's oppression and the message of the biblical text. Both must be open to transformation by the other. It is this openness which allows for a re-creation of divine metaphors, for example, or the re-claiming of patriarchal history as that of women also. Such openness must at the same time prevent a situation whereby women become new oppressors, with their objectives overriding the needs of other groups. The class character of the Exodus paradigm, for example, will serve as a reminder to Feminist theology that class oppression must also be addressed and challenged by a thoughtful hermeneutic.

4.6 Concluding Summary

Our study has shown that although the Exodus metaphor has been claimed by Feminist Liberation theology as a paradigm of liberation from the oppression of sexism, both historical and literary hermeneutical approaches ultimately fail to satisfy the dual aims of preserving the validity of the text while fulfilling the demand of Feminist theology that the full humanity of women be affirmed. As we have seen, the use of the metaphor as a broad paradigm of liberation must ignore any detail of the story which does not fit with the overall principle of "liberation"; while the search for "liberating fragments" gives a greater validity to the text but relies on marginal aspects only, so that the critical principle of Feminist theology is only indirectly affirmed.

These hermeneutical approaches are limited by the fact that they aim to give primary authority to the text, or at least to a scriptural principle which the hermeneutician claims lies behind the text. The introduction of a contextual hermeneutic allows the experience of the oppression of women to have equal authority with the text, and thus overcomes this problem. Viewing the text as a "production" rather than an objective starting point allows for its reinterpretation for new situations. That is, although a text may be used by particular historical situations, it is not confined to any particular historical or ideological setting. It is only where situation and text have equal hermeneutical authority that genuine dialogue is possible.

Such an approach has important implications for Feminist Liberation theology. The text may still be considered a source for this theology, but rather than searching for validation in the text, Feminist theology engages with the text,

text, the resultant meaning being found in the tension between text and situation - akin to the metaphorical process as discussed above. The text of the Exodus, viewed in this light, must be open to transformation, acting as prototype rather than archetype in the process of liberation. It is this openness of text and situation to each other which preserves the liberating nature of a metaphor such as the Exodus.

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