

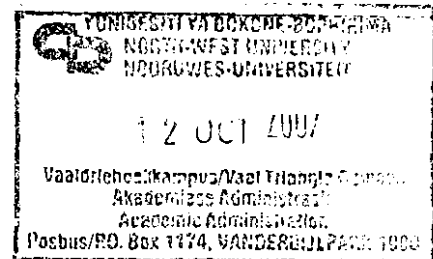
**Bible interpretation: An evaluation of two feminist approaches in the
light of recent developments within some South African churches**

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1. Background

1.1 Introduction

Hermeneutics is an ever-evolving field of study, which not only studies the process of understanding, but also enables people to justify their diverse understandings and interpretations of the Bible. In some churches, different ways of interpreting the Bible often lead to disagreement and even accusations of false teaching. This could be seen in among others Jackson's (2005:6) report on the allegations at the general conference of reverends of the Dutch Reform Church (NGK) that theological training, within this specific denomination, is not always pure and true. Firstly, a short overview of the major developments in the field of hermeneutics during the post-reformation era is given.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) introduced the question: *What is understanding?* and thereby became the one responsible for developing hermeneutics into a philosophical theory of understanding (Green, 2000:4). He suggested that it is not only language that makes understanding possible but also the intention of the author and that the reader should seek to reconstruct this intention (Smit, 1998:300). Wilhelm Dilthey (1844-1911) focused on history when he stated that interpretation and understanding require the conscious effort to overcome the historical distance, which the reader experiences between "then", and "now" (Smit, 1998:300). The hermeneutical problem, according to Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), rather has to do with reality, with meaning and with life itself. Heidegger introduced what is called the "hermeneutical circle" (Smit, 1998:301). Hans Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) defended the need for a culture-orientated reading of the text. He was of opinion that a conversation unfolds between the text and the interpreter, each with its own horizon. True understanding takes place when these two horizons fuse. The fusion of horizons, Gadamer concluded, is the aim of interpretation and the medium through which it takes place is language (Smit, 1998:301). Ricoeur (1913-2005) adds another dimension to interpretation by arguing that religious texts are only properly understood when it leads to action and thus have transformative power (Smit, 1998:301).

The above-mentioned developments in general hermeneutics brought about major changes. It resulted in biblical understanding not being viewed as exclusively objective but rather subjective. This broadened people's understanding and way of interpretation of the Bible so much so that new "forms" of theology and interpretation developed. Liberation theology, feminist theology and ecofeminist theology are some examples of the results of the developments in Bible interpretation. Liberation theology, according to Corley *et al.* (1996:370), proposes the liberation of oppressed peoples from social, economic, and political tyranny as the dominant theme of the Bible. Sawyer (1990:231) explains that interpreting the Bible from a feminist point of view offers an alternative assessment of the Bible as seen through the eyes and experience of women readers and theologians. Ecofeminism connects the domination of women by men with exploitation of nonhuman nature. The argument is that the two forms of domination are intimately connected and mutually reinforcing (Clifford, 2001:28). This study is, however, particularly interested in the developments within feminist theology and interpretation and how it influences the role of women in the church today.

1.2 Feminist Theology

For a time in the 1960's modern feminism took one of two forms. One form focussed on equality and liberation on the grounds of *similarities* between men and women while the other form worked for the same goals on the basis of *differences* between women and men, which demanded female self-expression (Thiselton, 1992:435). According to Thiselton (1992:430), feminist hermeneutics brings together the major issues in hermeneutical theory and it rests on the principle that the Bible has been interpreted in such a way to promote the oppression of women. Although feminist biblical interpretation is a diverse term, three main branches can be distinguished: the *radical or revolutionary*, the *reformist* and the *reconstructionist*. This study should be placed in the traditions developed within the latter two branches.

1.2.1 Reformist feminist theologians share their commitment to Christian tradition as well as a common approach in that they all go directly to the text, rather than through the history of interpretation. They read the text through feminist eyes, and then they turn to

the accepted (male dominated) interpretations and criticize these in the light of their readings. The Bible thus becomes the standard by which religious belief and practice are judged (Sawyer, 1990:232). According to Loades (1998:85), reformist feminist theologians make use of feminist interpretation to find resonance between those passages that are traditionally used against women's rights and the experiences of women of our own time.

1.2.2 Reconstructionist feminist theologians share with reformist feminists a commitment to Christianity. They seek, however, a liberating theological core for women within the Christian tradition while striving for a deeper transformation not only in the church but for a true reconstruction in society as well (Clifford, 2001:33).

Over and above the hermeneutical shift referred to above, biblical studies in the middle of the twentieth century also saw a development as regards specific approaches or methodologies related to understanding the Bible.

1.3 Approaches to Bible interpretation

1.3.1 The Historical approach

The historical approach focuses on what lies behind the present form of the text, due to the way in which historical issues are intertwined with theological ones (Gillingham, 1998:144). Gillingham (1998:157) summarizes the six most significant methods in the historical approach to understanding the Bible by saying that the earliest group was interested in the historical context of the **author** as well as the **date** and **origin** of the text. The second group takes interest in the **sources** the author may have used. The third tries to discover the **forms** that the author has chosen in order to convey his message. A next group is interested in the **traditions**, which may have influenced both the author and editors who have adapted the text. The fifth is interested in the influence of the final stage of revision - the **redaction** - of the whole text. The last group is characterized by its interest in the way in which texts have been collected and set alongside other works, which eventually made up Scripture; this activity is called '**canon criticism**'.

1.3.2 The Literary Approach

Exum and Clines (1993:11) emphasize that the primary concern of the literary approach is the text as an object or a product. The literary approach to biblical texts recognizes that a single text, passage or pericope generally forms a part of a larger whole - the document - of which it is a part. Literary criticism asks questions about the shape of the text in the here and now rather than being interested in the shaping of the text through the process of history (Gillingham, 1998:173). Hayes and Holladay (1987:80) sums up the literary approach by saying that literary criticism of a biblical text focus on the "world of the text", which includes its structure, style and mood.

1.4 Orientation and problem statement

In spite of the changes outlined above, namely new developments and movements in general hermeneutics and specific methodologies, many theologians abide by an older notion of interpretation. It seems as if they are so used to a more "objective" way of understanding the Bible that they ignore the developments that took place in hermeneutics over the past decades. This can be seen particularly among the Afrikaans churches in the reformed tradition in South Africa (NGK, NHK, GKSA) with regard to the role that women play within the church and especially church leadership. Although most churches in the reformed tradition allow women to play an active role in the church some still believe that women should not be allowed to preach sermons or serve as elders. Although two of the Afrikaans churches with a reformed inclination (NGK, NHK) in principle opened all the offices to women, the prevailing sentiment towards women in the church offices was manifested in the decisions of the latest synod (2006) of the GKSA to go back on an earlier decision regarding women as deacons, thus effectively barring women from holding any office in that church (cf. GKSA, 2006).

A certain interpretation of Bible passages that speaks about the role and place of women in the church resulted in the belief that women are not equal to men. This belief, that women are subordinated and should not play a leading role in the church (and society), developed because of a specific understanding of these biblical texts. This interpretation in turn rested on the role that women played in societies throughout history. According to

Clifford (2001:9), centuries ago, whatever was associated with being male was the standard for being human. This view resulted in severe discrimination against women and even today, in every part of the globe, women are still discriminated against because of their sex (Clifford, 2001:13).

Although the debate whether women can interpret the Bible and play an active role in the church began centuries ago, it is still controversial and seemingly unresolved in some reformed churches in South Africa today. According to Phillips (1999:389) feminist biblical interpretation took root in the seventeenth century when the impact of the reformation led Christian women to claim authority to interpret, teach and preach the Bible. In other words, they claimed the legitimate right to be theologians, pastors, reverends, deacons, elders and other roles that could be played in the church as body of Christ.

In a certain way the interpretation of specific verses from the Bible (e.g. the second creation story in Gen. 2) resulted in a deep-rooted belief that women are subordinated to men and can therefore not fulfill all the leadership roles in the church. If the same biblical passages are, however, interpreted by feminist theologians, it supports the view that men and women are equal, also in the church. This indicates that there is a direct correlation between how the Bible is interpreted, and the role that women play in the church. The question therefore can be asked: *“Which developments in hermeneutics are suited to the goal of enabling men and women to fulfill their callings in the Afrikaans churches with a reformed tradition in South Africa, without threatening the high regard of this community for the Bible as authoritative religious text?”*

In order to answer the above question this study will focus on reformist and reconstructionist feminist theology. Specific attention will be paid to the approaches of two feminist theologians, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Phyllis Trible. Although they share the same objective as feminist theologians, they differ in their approaches to the text. Fiorenza has a more historical approach to the text while Trible has a literary approach to the text. The main concern of this study can therefore be formulated thus:

What is the contribution that feminist orientated approaches to biblical interpretation can make in bringing about gender equality especially in (Afrikaans) reformed churches in South Africa?

1.5 Central Theoretical Statement

Certain feminist hermeneutical contributions offer approaches to the Bible that can bring about gender equality in (Afrikaans) reformed churches in South Africa, without negating the respect for the Bible text held by this community.

1.6 Research Questions

From this central theoretic statement follows the research questions that will be addressed in the proposed study:

1. How do the major developments in hermeneutics influence/shape the way in which the Bible is interpreted?
2. What are the causes of the controversy regarding the role of women in the church?
3. How did Fiorenza and Tribble go about to make the Bible a liberating text for women? How do their approaches compare?
4. How can developments in hermeneutics, such as feminist hermeneutics, be applied to enhance the role that women play in the church today?

1.7 Aim and objectives

In order to understand why the same text can be interpreted in such a way that opposing doctrines and views are formed, the major developments and approaches like the historical -, literary -, and interested approaches in biblical studies are discussed to discover how each of these approaches shape the way in which the Bible is interpreted.

The application of these approaches is also relevant to the controversy regarding the role of women in the church today. The developments resulted in what is referred to as "Feminist Hermeneutics". But before this approach to the Bible can be discussed, the causes of the controversy must first be explored. By looking into the history and

developments of feminism and feminist theology, one can begin to understand why the role of women in the church is still being debated in some churches.

Seeing that many (especially women) feel that women in the Afrikaans churches with a reformed tradition in South Africa, are treated unjustly in terms of their role in the church, a possible solution should be strived for. Therefore Fiorenza and Trible's views are evaluated in this study to see whether they can help to liberate subordinated women in the church today.

1.8 Method

This study will be conducted by making use of existing literature on hermeneutics and theology to give a broader view and understanding of the changes and developments in hermeneutics and of women's place in society and the church over the centuries. This will be based on international tendencies and developments. Then the study will zoom in on the situation in South Africa and more particular the churches in the reformed tradition. Seeing that there are not many published books available on the current situation yet, the local tendencies and developments will be traced by making use of official documents of synods, and media reports. Unpublished academic work on the issue (e.g. theses and dissertations), as well as scholarly articles that have appeared in this regard will also be utilised. The following chapter division forms the outline of the argument.

1.9 Chapter Division

1. Introduction
2. Recent developments in Biblical Interpretation and Hermeneutics
 - 2.1 Introduction
 - 2.2 General Hermeneutics – an overview
 - 2.3 Historical approaches
 - 2.4 Literary approaches
 - 2.5 Interested approaches
 - 2.6 Summary

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2 Recent developments in Biblical Interpretation and Hermeneutics

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to give an overview of general hermeneutics by firstly focusing on philosophers and other critics who introduced new ideas and in so doing brought about changes in the field of hermeneutics. Secondly, the manifestation of some of these changes in theology in so-called historical and literary approaches to the Bible will be discussed. This overview should serve as background to understand how developments in hermeneutics influenced theologians' view on the role of women in the church and society. Once a clearer picture of the field of hermeneutics is obtained, it will become easier to understand how some people use the Bible to prove that women are subordinated to men, while others can use the same text to prove that women are equal to men.

2.2 General Hermeneutics - An Overview

Reference has been made to the complexity of understanding and the subsequent developments in hermeneutics in the previous chapter. There are, however, certain key developments and role players that should be noted when one studies Bible interpretation. These developments and role players will now each be discussed.

2.2.1 Schleiermacher

By the end of the eighteenth century the German theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), advocated that interpreting the Bible is the same as interpreting any other book. This severely influenced the specially privileged hold which religious tradition had on its sacred text (Gillingham, 1998:135).

According to Smit (1998:300), Schleiermacher introduced the question: *What is understanding?* He suggested that it is not only the language that the speakers (authors) and listeners (readers) share that make understanding possible but also the intention of the author. It is due to this individual intention of the author, in relation to the individuality of the reader, that *misunderstanding* is possible. Schleiermacher is of opinion that the language we share cannot adequately express the unique experience of

the individual author, and therefore the reader must reconstruct the intention of the author. This is possible because both the author and the reader share human spirits. Hermeneutics becomes necessary at this point and interpretation involves two "steps" namely, grammatical interpretation and psychological interpretation. The first step only prepares the way for the second, which is full understanding (Smit, 1998:300).

According to Green (2000:4), Schleiermacher has been called "the father of modern hermeneutics" because he is the one responsible for developing hermeneutics into a philosophical theory of understanding. It is significant to note that Schleiermacher rests revelation on the religious self-consciousness of the community rather than on authoritatively communicated truths or on truths gleaned from speculative reason. Schleiermacher's basic theological conclusions were determined by his belief that human experience is the source of revelation (Ferguson, 1973:44).

2.2.2 Dilthey

Dilthey, like Schleiermacher, was of opinion that the interpreter must experience or re-experience the original creative moment of the author in order to do justice to the text (Ferguson, 1973:169). For Wilhelm Dilthey (1844-1911) the focus, however, was on history. More than taking interest in the interpretation and understanding of human communication, he asks the general question: How do we understand history? How do we interpret and reconstruct history? (Smit, 1998:300).

Interpretation and understanding require the conscious effort to overcome the historical distance which the reader experience between "then" and "now". Dilthey believed that, whoever wants to understand a text, must transpose him- or herself out of the present to the past and re-experience the original experience. The text to be read and interpreted is, for Dilthey, not the physical text of communication, but the text of the whole cultural heritage of humanity (Smit, 1998:300). According to Dilthey, the historian is able to interpret the past because all historical events are effects of the human spirit in whose structures and capacities all humanity, including the historian, participates. Dilthey thus

saw a need for a common element between the author and the interpreter - a common interest in a common subject (Ferguson, 1973:170).

2.2.3 Heidegger

The hermeneutical problem, according to Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), has to do with reality, with meaning and with life itself (Smit, 1998:301). It is not only a matter of understanding the text or the history, tradition and cultures behind the text but it is a matter of understanding life itself. To be human, says Heidegger, is to be interpreting. Humans must therefore attempt to understand. He viewed language as the key to unlock the mystery of human existence (Ferguson, 1973:77). Heidegger introduced what is called the "hermeneutical circle". This entails that the interpreter approaches a text with a pre-understanding, while interpreting this 'pre-understanding' is shaped and modified to form a new horizon for the next text that is interpreted. This whole process takes place within language. It is in language that reality reveals something of itself and where we find new challenges and new possibilities for being human (Smit, 1998:301).

Ferguson (1973:170) summarizes Heidegger's hermeneutical position in the following three phases that constitute a unity:

- The text is to be interpreted in terms of human self-understanding.
- A shift away from pre-understanding to an attitude which receives the text itself as it confronts the interpreter, takes place.
- The author can be seen as having a direct rapport with the theme and the language of the text is viewed as the language of Being.

2.2.4 Gadamer

Hans Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) was born in Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century and he defended the need for a culture-orientated reading of the text. This involves the reader being challenged to recognize the critical differences between the worlds of the writers and the worlds of the readers and to appreciate what these two worlds have in common in spite of their differences (Gillingham, 1998:138).

Gadamer was of opinion that hermeneutics is not a method, an objective or scientific inquiry. What he was most concerned about to refute was the claim that the scientific method alone is able to arrive at the truth (Silva, 1994:232). He claimed that hermeneutics is concerned with seeking the experience of truth that transcends the sphere of the control of scientific method (Ferguson, 1973:6). Gadamer said that truth is only found in a conversation with reality and in a dialogical process. A conversation or dialogue unfolds between the text and the interpreter, each with its own horizon. True understanding takes place when the two horizons fuse. The fusion of horizons is the aim of interpretation and the medium through which it takes place is language (Smit, 1998:3001).

Kaiser (1994:29) summarizes Gadamer's view of interpretation as follows:

- Prejudice in interpretation is unavoidable and should therefore be encouraged in order to understand a work as a whole.
- The meaning of a text always goes beyond its author and therefore understanding is a productive activity. The meaning is determined by the subject matter rather than by the author.
- The explanation of a text takes place through the "fusion of horizons". A text cannot be explained only through the interpreter's perspective or only by looking at the original historical situation of the text. In the process of understanding, these two perspectives are subsumed into a new third alternative.
- Past meanings cannot be reproduced in the present because the being of the past can not be exactly the same in the present.

Gadamer argued that whenever one interprets a text, one opens oneself to the superior claims the text makes and responds to what it has to tell. The reader does not take control of the meaning which the text affirms, but rather the reader seeks to serve the text. This implies that the reader lets the text dominate his/her mind so that a valid interpretation and application issue forth (Newport, 1996:140).

2.2.5 Ricoeur

Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) used the same culture-centered approach as Gadamer but he added another dimension to biblical hermeneutics by arguing that a religious text is only properly understood when it leads to action. He was of the opinion that the real power of a text is transformative power which implies that the text refers to something like a world in front of the text. The text invites the readers to adopt or inhabit this world (Smit, 1998:301). Ricoeur was both a Christian in the Reformed tradition and a major figure in contemporary hermeneutical theory and he developed the notion of a "hermeneutics of suspicion" (Green, 2000:11). Ricoeur argued that biblical language always contains a "surplus of meaning" and this implies that the interpretative task is never completed. According to him, this aspect of biblical language is rooted in its symbolic nature (Green, 2000:173).

Ricoeur focused his concern on the philosophy of language and went as far as to say that "man" is language. His primary concern was not with the exposition of the Bible for the community of faith, but with the rational clarification of human existence in the world (Ferguson, 1973:179). Ricoeur noted the need for a pre-understanding of the text which is not only about trying to gain some awareness of the history of the text, but also involves an awareness of the language in which the text is communicated (Gillingham, 1998:138).

2.2.6 Conclusion

From the above the influence of contemporary philosophers on the field of hermeneutics is evident. Firstly, Schleiermacher brought about major changes by introducing a philosophical theory of understanding. Dilthey in turn placed the focus on understanding and reconstructing history so that the author and interpreter can have a common interest in a common subject. Heidegger contributed by introducing the hermeneutical circle while Gadamer developed the notion of a fusion of horizons. Lastly, Ricoeur emphasized the transformative power of a text as well as introducing a hermeneutics of suspicion which is employed by Fiorenza among others in her work as will be seen later in this study.

These, however, were not the only changes in the field of biblical interpretation. Different methodologies, which are relevant for this study, were also developed and therefore these approaches will be discussed in the next section.

2.3 The Historical Approach to the Bible

According to Goldingay (1995:167), the conviction that any passage of scripture should be understood against its historical background has been the least controversial part of biblical interpretation for a century. He maintains further that since Scripture is inspired, one can imply that it is capable of speaking beyond the context in which it was written. Yet Scripture refuses us the option of understanding God's word without historical rootedness.

The historical approach to the Bible focuses on what lies behind the text due to the way in which historical issues are intertwined with theological ones (Gillingham, 1998:144). Corley *et al.* (1996:367) indicates that the term "historical criticism" is used to mean the historical setting of a document such as time, place or sources. The term can further be used to describe and emphasize the historical analysis of the text. Goldingay (1995:167) argues that Scripture is not just a set of timeless propositions that can be applied universally because they have no inherent connection with any particular context. Therefore, whoever interprets the Bible, should see it as God's word operating in relation to particular sets of circumstances (Thiselton, 1980:95).

There are primarily five approaches in Bible interpretation that can be viewed as 'historical': literary or source criticism, form criticism, tradition criticism, redaction criticism and canon criticism. The main focus of each of these approaches will now be discussed.

2.3.1 'Literary Criticism' or Source Criticism

The interest in the author, date and provenance of a text by way of its author was known as 'literary criticism'. This term has a much different meaning today (as will be seen in a later discussion) but this method still serves in biblical studies to try and understand the

literature through a historical lens. To avoid confusion, however, it is generally known as 'biblical criticism' today. This approach can be linked to the 'literal' way of reading a text during the Romantic movement, as well as the rising interest in the historical reading of a text during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Gillingham, 1998:158). In its broadest sense, 'biblical criticism' encompasses all questions that the reader can ask about the text itself, including its authorship, historical setting and various aspects of the language and content of the text (Hayes & Holladay, 1987:73). Biblical criticism was marked by the belief that the reader can know something about the original setting of the biblical text. The most important issue in this method was the personality inspiring the work and therefore the Bible books were named according to the believed author of the text.

Historically, 'literary criticism' in its post-enlightenment usage had a narrow focus referring primarily to source or documentary analysis which is known as 'source criticism' today. Source criticism is a method used in handling texts that have been produced by amalgamating other, older texts. Since it is believed that many biblical books were produced in this way, source criticism attempts to divide them into their component parts (Barton, 1996:20). Source criticism was thus known as 'literary' criticism for many years. Near the end of the nineteenth century this approach fully emerged into an approach which focused partly on the text and partly on the author. It is a method that could be applied to a variety of texts. The origins of this method are seen as early as the eighteenth century when it was still called 'literary' criticism. It sprung from the problem of contradictions seen in biblical accounts, for example the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2 (Goldingay, 1995:159). Source critics also look for signs of multiple authorship in biblical texts and they tried to trace the development of the text through different stages (Barton, 1996:21).

Source criticism was the first modern method developed to answer historical questions. It seeks to determine what written documents or sources a writer or editor used to produce a book (Johnson, 1996:100). According to Barton (1996:21), this method tends to identify earlier 'sources' that were used to compose a biblical text in the form we know it today.

The concern of source criticism is at the same time literary, historical and theological. It is literary in the sense that it desires to discover how each Bible book was composed; it is historical because of the interest it takes in the history of the people which the sources help to unravel; and it is theological in its attempt to compare the theology of the sources to that of the extant documents (Ferguson, 1973:74).

Johnson (1996:101) identifies the following factors which motivated scholars to study the problem of different sources:

- The Old Testament itself names many sources that were used in its compilation. The mentioning of these books shows that the biblical writers used material from these earlier texts although these books are apparently lost forever.
- Peculiarities in some stories raised the question whether their original arrangement was kept. A way to explain these, sometimes contradicting, peculiarities is to conclude that the author drew on different texts that were already in fixed form.
- The Enlightenment of the eighteenth century promoted the development of modern historiography. A search for the earliest documentation of a series of events to explain the past, led to the discovering of possible sources used to compile texts like the Pentateuch or the Gospels in these texts themselves.

Ferguson (1973:73) summarizes source criticism effectively by naming the following threefold objectives:

- Tracing the development of the document and observing how a variety of sources contributed to the final form of the document.
- Evaluating the historical accuracy of the text in the light of its historical development.
- Determining the interdependence of various biblical documents.

2.3.2 Form Criticism

According to Bruce (1985:600), form criticism is "the analytic study of the 'forms' assumed by various categories of tradition especially in its oral preliterate phase". Bruce (1979-1988:822) goes on to say that form criticism represents an endeavour to determine

the oral pre-history of written documents or sources, and to classify the material according to the various 'forms' or categories of narrative. The German word 'Formgeschichte' can be translated as 'form criticism' in English. This criticism was coined in 1919 by Martin Dibelius to describe his analysis of the popular oral tradition underlying the written Gospels. Dibelius was influenced by a similar approach to parts of the Old Testament which was pioneered by Herman Gunkel around 1900 (Muddiman, 1996:243).

Hayes and Holladay (1987:83) describes form criticism as being related to genre analysis which focuses more on the smaller literary sections or pericopes. They continue to say that genre analysis is that aspect of criticism which examines the form, content, and function of a particular unit and asks the question whether these are definite enough and typical enough for the unit to be classified and interpreted as belonging to a particular genre. When the genre of a text is known, the reader can know what types of questions can sensibly be asked of the material. Since form criticism developed in a German context, the term which is translated as 'genre' is the German word 'Gattung'.

Identifying various literary genres, however, is not the only concern of form criticism. Form criticism is also concerned with establishing or determining the 'Sitz im Leben' or, as can be said in English, the 'situation in life', in which the particular genres were produced, shaped and used (Hayes & Holladay, 1987:81). According to Barton (1996:31), form criticism was understood not only as affording insight into the biblical text by isolating pre-literary stages in its growth, but also as a tool in reconstructing the social life and institutions of the ancient biblical communities. According to Bruce (1985:601), the life-setting usually means the setting in the life of the primitive Christian community which determines the preservations of certain elements in the tradition about Jesus and the form in which they were preserved, when defined in form-critical terms in the New Testament context.

2.3.3 Tradition Criticism

People wrote the whole Bible, and whether these people were part of ancient Israel or one of Jesus' disciples, every author wrote from a specific context. They were part of a specific culture and all cultures have traditions. Traditions are passed from one generation to the next and it gives expression to people's self-understanding, their sense of their past, their systems of believe, and their codes of conduct. Tradition criticism concerns itself with both the nature of these traditions and how they are employed and changed in the course of a community's history (Hayes & Holladay, 1987:92).

Interest in the earliest evidence behind the Bible was one of the factors that motivated source and form criticism. While source criticism focused on the earliest written documents, form criticism focused on the earliest oral material. In order to 'fully' understand the text in its present state, however, a greater explanation had to be offered. Both the historical understanding and the theological interpretation of a text could be helpful in this regard (Johnson, 1996:106). Tradition criticism offers exactly this by focusing on the theological influences on the writers as well as the traditional influences on the history of the text.

Tradition criticism is interested in the context in which an idea is expressed and Gillingham (1998:165) indicates that there are two emphases within tradition criticism. The first is on the theological influences on the writers themselves. This concludes that every writer has absorbed the ideas and beliefs of his day. The writers are, as a matter of fact, believed to have borrowed from the forms in which those thoughts were expressed; this includes the key religious or theological ideas prevalent at the time. These theological traditions could either already have been established as literary works or they could have been used in some oral form. The second emphasis of tradition criticism is to see the influence of any tradition upon the development of a text at various stages in the history of its transmission. It thus puts the focus on the role of the community in shaping the tradition. This can rather be seen as an interest in the theological developments of the text. Gillingham (1998:165) describes it as "from faith for faith".

According to Hayes and Holladay (1987:92), a great part of the Bible is composed of traditions within a culture and the text often reflects the traditions of a specific stage. Different stages of the same tradition may be evident at different places and in different ways in the text. These different stages can reflect different theological perspectives or different chronological periods or both. The challenge for the reader according to Cranford (1996:123), is to probe whether the author has used pieces of tradition in the creation of the text. The Gospels can be used to illustrate the role that tradition plays seeing that a comparative study of this double or triple tradition material can be done. This study reveals that much of the material in the Gospels was passed along in a relatively fixed form. This passing along could have taken place orally or in written form. The remainder of the text that was neither passed along orally nor in written form, is another concern for the tradition critic. The aim is to trace the use of other traditions in the text and to discover how the author incorporated them into his writing. The history of each detected piece should be investigated as far as possible to enable the reader to understand the way in which the author applied it to his subject better (Cranford, 1996:123).

2.3.4 Redaction Criticism

According to Hayes and Holladay (1987:101), the primary focus of redaction criticism is the editorial stages that led toward or produced the final written form or composition of a passage. Cranford (1996:125) explains it by saying that source and tradition criticism focus on the 'microscopic' view of text, but redaction criticism focuses on the 'macroscopic' view. In this view form criticism would focus on a meso-sopic view of the text. Redaction criticism further attempts to discern the theological motifs that the biblical authors used to arrange and modify the material they received. The redaction critic focuses on the author's apparent purpose and on the editorial process itself unlike the form-critical approach that tended to undercut the intention and personality of the author (Ferguson, 1973:76). Since it concerns itself with the final stage of the text, redaction criticism is the most clear and obvious of the methods of historical reading (Gillingham, 1998:166).

Redaction criticism presupposes both the perspectives and the insights of tradition criticism as well as form criticism. It is assumed that biblical texts have a pre-history and that this pre-history can be reconstructed in most instances with a degree of certainty (Du Rand, 2005:169). Redaction criticism does not try to harmonise differences in a story but instead permits each account to speak for itself. It further seeks to make sense of the distinctive features of each account (Du Rand, 2005:170).

According to Ferguson (1973:76), redaction criticism works toward clarifying the nature and extent of the author's own contribution to the work. He agrees with Du Rand that it presupposes source and form criticism but he goes further by noting that redaction criticism attempts to determine how the biblical authors collected, arranged and edited traditional material in a particular set of circumstances with a specific objective in mind. Ferguson (1973:76) continues by identifying the following aspects that redaction criticism examines:

- The author's inclusion and omission of traditional material.
- The modifications of the material
- The arrangement of the material.
- The contributions from the author's own theological intention.

Since tradition criticism and form criticism became entirely pre-occupied with smaller literary units and sub-units within biblical texts, redaction criticism served as a healthy corrective. Redaction criticism, in contrast to tradition criticism and form criticism, emphasises the wholeness of the Bible books and seeks not to simply see the individual parts, but what they were saying when arranged together as a single whole. The redaction critic is thus never satisfied to take as object of study a single literary sub-unit but rather seeks to relate it to the larger whole (Hayes & Holladay, 1987:106).

2.3.5 Canon Criticism

Although this approach is viewed in some circles as a-historical (Barton 1996:90), this discussion will highlight the reason for its inclusion among historical approaches. Brevard Childs advocated an approach where one first determines what constitutes sacred

Scripture as an authority base for faith and practice. This approach has come to be called 'canon criticism' (Cranford, 1996:117). Childs became dissatisfied with the other historical approaches to the Bible because it focuses too much on what is behind the text and therefore he says that the Bible as Scripture should be the point of departure. The canon that a religious community uses can be seen as foundational documents since they are used to live by. This status of canonical texts is based on a community's belief that they reflect and bear testimony to truth in a specific manner (Hayes & Holladay, 1987:122).

Canon criticism asks questions about the overall theology of a book. It is more a theological than a historical approach, but it also focuses on the importance of the community (Du Rand, 2005:171). The importance of the community as the guardian of the received traditions expressed is the focus point, rather than having the individual focus of redaction criticism. It thus asks questions about the ideas expressed in the text, rather than the intentions of the earlier writers (Gillingham, 1998:168). According to Du Rand (2005:172), canon criticism believes in the ultimate theological uniformity of the books in the Bible and the Bible as a book and it concerns itself with the text as a unit of communication. The concern, however, is not only with the text but also with the community of faith that preserved and transmitted it.

According to Hayes and Holladay (1987:123), the following considerations related to canonical interpretation should be noted:

- A canonical reading of the same text will differ depending upon which believing community is doing the reading.
- Canonization separated the meaning of the texts from their dependence on their historical or original use.
- A canonical approach avoids isolated interpretation where the text is interpreted as an isolated unit on its own.
- Canonical criticism is theological in its approach.

According to Gillingham (1998:169), the canonical approach offered an alternative approach to the Bible and in a sense this approach prepared the way for what was to come, namely a literary approach to the Bible.

2.4 The Literary Approach to the Bible

In the middle of the twentieth century biblical scholars began questioning the historical approach to the Bible more and more. The reason for this was the doubt whether this approach was adequate for discovering all the insights from the texts. This resulted in attempts to apply modern techniques of literary analysis to biblical texts. Although the term "literary criticism" has been around for a long time, its meaning shifted repeatedly and therefore one has to be clear on what is intended when you use this term (Cranford, 1996:126).

Traditional literary criticism was discussed above and it was seen that this method, founded in the late nineteenth century, can be described as historical and affective (Barton, 1996:143). According to Barton (1996:143), this approach as found in general literary criticism was interested in the literary history which involves the discerning of 'periods' in the development of literature; discovering influences that writers had on each other and taking interest in the biography of poets and writers and in the effect that the events in an author's life and his psychological experience might have had on his work. Barton (1996:143) goes further to explain that traditional literary criticism was affective in the sense that it was concerned with the emotional effect that literature had on the reader and it also concerned itself with that emotions that the poet had experienced and of which his work might be seen as a distillation. Cranford (1996:126) adds that "literary criticism" tended to refer to pursuit of authorship, time, place and date of composition or else it referred to the literary aspects of tradition, source and form criticism as was discussed under the previous heading.

Freeman (1996:314) notes that the primary focus in the literary approach as it is known today, is not upon the author or the author's intended meaning, but rather upon the text itself and the relationship of its various components to one another. It analyzes the

surface of the text rather than delving beneath the text. Lovejoy (1996:319) is of opinion that literary criticism is appropriate in biblical studies since literary form and theological content cannot be separated easily. The form of a text is part of its meaning. If one would only casually contrast content and form, one is over simplifying the text.

A transition thus emerges from the historical approach to the literary approach, as it is known today. Where before things like patterns of repetition, tension, contradiction or omission were seen within the historical approach as evidence of 'sources' and perhaps unfinished editing, within the literary paradigm, these very same features acquired a positive significance. They were seen as literary devices placed in the text with the purpose to impact the reader (Thiselton, 1992:50).

Clines and Exum (1993:11) emphasize that the primary concern of the literary approach is the text as an object or a product. The literary approach of biblical texts recognizes that a single text, passage or pericope generally forms a part of a larger whole - the document - of which it is a part. Literary criticism is also known as a synchronic approach because it works with the present form of the text. It asks questions about the shape of the text in the here and now rather than being interested in the shaping of the text through the process of history as in diachronic approaches discussed above (Gillingham, 1998:173). Hayes and Holladay (1987:80) sums up the literary approach by saying that the literary criticism of a biblical text focuses on the "world of the text" which includes its structure, its style and its mood. The main branches of the literary approach are: linguistic criticism, structuralist criticism, New Criticism and rhetorical criticism.

2.4.1 Linguistic Criticism

Much has been said about 'literary criticism' and the shift in meaning that this term has undergone. The term 'literary criticism', however, is also used to describe a particular branch within the literary approach. According to Johnson (1996:108), the term "literary criticism", in the last twenty years, has more and more been used to designate the kind of analysis used in reading any written work. Questions about how a text came to be written are less important than examining the nature of the text in its present form. Analyzing the text is indeed what literary criticism in its present form looks at. The approach broadly

focuses on the meaning of words and terms in the texts, known as semantic readings, as well as linguistic readings (Du Rand, 2005:175). For this reason the term "linguistic criticism" rather than "literary criticism" has been used to prevent confusion when referring to this approach.

A semantic reading of a text concerns itself with the interpretation of different biblical terms used in texts. It attempts to discover why one term is used and not another. The interpretation of terms in semantic readings is by way of reference to the contemporary reader's setting. Meaning thus arises out of the text itself. This approach is closely related to the next branch of the literary approach namely the structuralist approach, because it is also concerned with the patterns of the language (Gillingham, 1998:177).

According to Gillingham (1998:178), the importance in the linguistic approach in literary criticism is the relationship between one word and another. The focus is on the way in which the choice of vocabulary and the associations of words in relation to each other affect our understanding of the text.

2.4.2 Structuralist Criticism

Structuralism concerns itself with structures of language to which the particular linguistic expressions in Scripture belong. It tries to explain how language functions at a deep structural level and is interested in the mental structures of human thinking that express themselves in texts and symbols (Newport, 1996:136). According to Ferguson (1973:78), more emphasis is placed on semiotics, the study of the system of signs, than on semantics, the meaning of a sign.

Structuralist criticism studies a text in a non-historical and a-temporal way. Structuralist research assumes that all social activity is governed by abstract rules and conventions (Hayes & Holladay, 1987:78). Structuralist critics choose the text itself as the object of reflection, rather than the author or the reader. The emphasis is on the relationship of the words to the text more than on the meaning of the words in the text intended by the original author (Ferguson, 1973:78).

Barton (1996:105) identifies two reasons why biblical scholars have moved in the direction of a structuralist approach. The first is because of a sense of disappointment and disillusionment with the traditional historical methods because these methods did not necessarily bring the reader to a better understanding of the text. The second was the growing awareness amongst biblical scholars that their traditional ways of studying biblical texts were out of line with the developments that took place in the wider literary world.

A common term in structuralist criticism is 'binary opposition' which refers to the idea that meaning is a function of contrast within a given system. We must thus know which system or structure a word is part of before we can determine its meaning (Barton, 1996:111).

2.4.3 New Criticism

When "New Criticism" emerged in literary circles in the 1940's, it helped provide the tools needed for a literary approach to the Bible in the new sense of the word (Cranford, 1996:126). According to Barton (1996:142), New Criticism flourished mainly in America but with considerable influence in Britain in the 1940's and 1950's. New Criticism concerns itself with issues such as the relationship of content to form, the significance of structure for meaning, the capacity of language to direct thought and to mold existence itself (Cranford, 1996:126). Cranford (1996:26) lists the following investigative procedures that are followed: classification of genre; identification of major themes; determination of structure; and concern for distinctive features of the narrative. Barton (1996:144), however, identifies three major theses of the New Criticism which mark it off sharply from what went before. These are:

- That a literary text is an artifact;
- That 'intentionalism' is a fallacy and
- That the meaning of a text is a function of its place in a literary canon.

2.4.4 Rhetorical Criticism

According to Hayes and Holladay (1987:74), the writings of the biblical authors as well as those whose speeches were written down, was produced in particular situations and contexts. These particular occasions and contexts can be called 'rhetorical situations'. It involves an audience, a speaker or writer, a topic of mutual concern and an opportunity for communication. In a rhetorical situation the communicator wants to persuade the audience of something particular. Rhetorical criticism can therefore be seen as viewing the text as a vehicle for persuasion. It asks questions about the arrangement of material and the choice of the discourse and seeks an affinity between the reader and the text in this respect (Gillingham, 1998:182).

Tull (1999:161) notes that George Kennedy summarizes the task of rhetorical criticism as follows: Rhetorical criticism "takes the text as we have it, whether the work of a single author or the product of editing, and looks at it from the point of view of the author's or editor's intent, the unified results, and how it would be perceived by an audience of near contemporaries."

Rhetorical criticism can, however, have more diverse meanings than only seeking to persuade. The approach that is meant by this term depends on the understanding of the nature of language itself. Du Rand (2005:179) states that it has to do with the question whether a text may be viewed as a single whole, or as relatively self-contained; or whether a text must be viewed in relation to its surroundings. While some critics focus on stylistic features or rhetorical devices of the text itself, others attend to factors that lie beyond the immediate text (Du Rand, 2005:179). Rhetorical criticism is in the first instance about asking questions aimed at discovering the rhetoric of the text and secondly it is about giving answers to fill in what is lacking the rhetoric of the text. It is for this reason that rhetorical criticism is used as an important tool by feminist scholars like Tribble (Gillingham, 1998:183). Her use of this method will be discussed in a later chapter.

2.5 Interested Approaches to the Bible

The developments within general hermeneutics played a significant role in the origin of this approach. The belief that a text can be approached objectively to unlock the truth by using scientific methods (like those discussed above) slowly started to allow space for the realization that all knowledge and truth are co-determined by the pre-suppositions of the investigator. This is clearly seen with the ideas that Gadamer introduced. This approach acknowledges specific pre-suppositions and makes it clear that the approach is "interested", unlike previous approaches that cling to the objective understanding free from pre-suppositions. Thiselton (1992:410) indicates that the interested approach normally results in one of the following themes:

- A construction of critiques of frameworks of interpretation.
- An alternative re-interpretation of biblical texts from the standpoint of a particular context of experience and action.
- A search for critical tools and resources to unmask the uses of biblical texts, which serve social interests of dominion and oppression.

2.5.1 Liberation Theology and Hermeneutics

Liberation theology emerged as a revolutionary theological movement in the 1960's in Latin America and the hermeneutics of liberation constitutes a new way of reading the Bible. Liberationists emphasize that the starting point for theological reflection is the situation of the poor. They believe that the biblical God is on the side of the oppressed in society. This belief is based on the fact that God redeemed the Israelites from Egyptian bondage in the Old Testament and in the New Testament Jesus made a personal option for the poor and regarded them as the main recipients of his message. Even the prophets (OT) and the apostles (NT) emphasized that the poor should not be ignored when they proclaimed the gospel. These biblical facts resulted in the view that faith is active and is verified when informed by love, solidarity and striving for justice. Living the true faith thus enables the Christian to hear the cry of the oppressed (Sherbok, 1996:397). Segundo (1976:7-38) declares that Liberation Theologians suspect "that anything and everything involving ideas, including theology, is intimately bound up with the existing social situation in at least an unconscious way".

According to Sherbok (1996:397), liberation theologians draw special inspiration and strength from the book of Exodus, the Gospels, the book of Acts and the book of Revelation in their attempt to create a better society. In the attempt to understand the true meaning of the Christian message, there is a hermeneutical circle existing between the poor and the world. This reading of the Bible that is done from the point of view of the poor favours application rather than explanation. In other words, liberation hermeneutics thus attempts to activate the transforming energy of biblical texts by stressing the social context of the biblical message.

In *A Theology of Liberation* (1973) Gustavo Gutiérrez outlines four fundamental contributory factors to liberation theology:

- An empathetic understanding of the situation of the poor by bible believing Christians.
- Socio-critical reflection and tools to determine the underpinnings of society and through a criticism of society improve the situation of the poor.
- The message of biblical texts concerning liberation, like the book of Exodus, is used as a foundation for liberation theology.
- Language of promise and of eschatology is used to place hope in what is strived for but not yet achieved.

Liberation theology is a powerful force in modern society and it has raised central questions about the role of the church and religious faith in a secular age, placing biblical teaching at the forefront of its activity (Sherbok, 1996:397). Liberation theology, however, did not end in Latin America. Black North American theologians began to use this term independently more or less at the same time and today it is clear that oppressive contexts are characterized not only by socio-political domination but also by cultural and gender domination (Kiogora, 1998:338). This resulted in what is called Black Theology/Hermeneutics and Feminist Theology/Hermeneutics.

2.5.1.1 Black Hermeneutics

Black Theology is defined by Maimela (1998:112) as a conscious, systematic, theological reflection on black *experience*, characterized by oppression, humiliation and suffering in white racist societies in North America and South Africa.

Black Hermeneutics is a positive reading of the Bible so that the oppressed, in this case the black person, is situated at the center of God's historic plan of salvation. It is extended, however, to include all the oppressed, not just black people. Black hermeneutics makes connections with all other forms of Liberation Hermeneutics, although its starting point is particular historic suffering of black people as the underclass (Kiogora, 1998:342).

Like Liberation Hermeneutics, Black Hermeneutics recognizes God as a liberating God who was revealed in Jesus Christ to be open to all humanity. The importance of Black Theological Hermeneutics according to Kiogora (1998:342), has been its attempt to break away from a theological tradition dominated by members of a race that did not incorporate the experience of oppression as a necessary starting point in its theology.

2.5.1.2 Feminist Hermeneutics

The main aim of feminist hermeneutics is summarized by Thiselton (1992:430) when he explains that it rests on the principle that biblical texts in the past have been interpreted in such a way as to promote and legitimate oppressive social roles to women. He continues to explain that certain biblical texts, as interpreted by many Christian traditions, are perceived to have been transposed into instruments of power, domination and social control. Feminist theologians attempt to find a critical hermeneutical principle that will unmask this interpretation. Greater emphasis will be placed on this field of hermeneutics in the following chapter when a detailed discussion will be given, since it is extremely significant and relevant for this study.

2.5.2 Reader-Response Criticism

The reader-response approach is another approach within interested approaches to the Bible. It emphasizes the relation between the texts and the reader in contrast with the earlier methods that focus on the autonomy of the text. Newport (1996:138) goes as far as to say that despite all the attempts to meaning that the other methods offer, the full meaning of the text is ultimately supplied by the reader. Reader-response criticism asks the question "What is it about us that generates the meaning we find in the text?" It thus gives the reader a part in the production of meaning (Barton, 1996:209). According to Gillingham (1998:183), reader-response criticism indicates exactly what it signifies: the reader supplies a filling for the gaps which are in the text and irons out the repetitions and the doublets and the inconsistencies. This can either be done by harmonizing them or by offering an alternative explanation. It is assumed that there are as many responses to one text as there are readers. McKnight (1999:230) illustrates the conventional approaches by saying that these approaches view the meaning of a text as the content of a nut that simply awaits its extraction by a reader. He continues by explaining that reader-response criticism approaches biblical literature in terms of the values, attitudes and responses of the readers.

Thiselton (1992:515) indicates that reader-response criticism involves more than just an individual reader when he refers to 'communities of readers' who seek what a text means for them through reader-response criticism. Wolfgang Iser is one of the more notable reader-response theorists and he draws on a theory of perception to establish the role of readers in filling in or completing a textual meaning that would otherwise remain only potential rather than actual (Thiselton, 1992:151). The reader-response approach, according to McKnight (1999:240) frees, to some extent at least, the biblical text from its domination by disciplines such as history, sociology and psychology.

2.6 Summary

In this section it was indicated that hermeneutics and Bible interpretation have evolved immensely over the years. Different philosophers contributed to the developments that took place. It became clear that the historical approach was later supplemented by the

literary approach and ultimately the interested approach came into being. The next section will go further in exploring one of the interested approaches that was mentioned, namely Feminist Hermeneutics.

3.2 The History and Development of Feminism

The term feminism was coined in the late nineteenth century by Hubertine Auclert. She used this term in 1882 to refer to the struggle of women to gain political rights. The term, however, was not the beginning of women's struggle to make themselves heard (Clifford, 2001: 1). This struggle goes back much further in history. Feminism is not easy to define and according to Foreza (1993: 20), it is often confusing because suggesting a definition requires taking a specific political stance. Such a definition depends on how the person suggesting the definition views the past, present and future relationships between women and men in their particular contexts. In general people view a feminist as someone who dislikes and distrusts men but it should be acknowledged that a feminist is in many cases rather someone who seeks equality and greater justice for women (Loder, 2001: 5).

Phillips (1999: 288) attempts to formulate a definition by saying that feminism is a movement that commits itself to women's self-determination and offers alternatives to the prevailing male-dominated political and social structures. It is, however, an extremely diverse movement and Phillips goes on to identify a core feminist conviction that stands amid the diversity. He describes this by saying (Phillips, 1999: 289).

"Women are by nature neither inferior to nor derivative of men; nor do men by nature embody a normative humanity to which women are subordinate. Rather, women's humanity, with its attendant rights and responsibilities, including the authority to interpret sacred texts, must be acknowledged and respected by civil communities."

3 Feminism in Hermeneutics and Women in the Church

3.1 Introduction

The following chapter is aimed at elaborating on feminist hermeneutics, that was mentioned in the previous section. Firstly, however, the history and development of feminism in general will be discussed where after a look at feminist theology and -interpretation is taken. Another part of the chapter will focus on how developments in hermeneutics have affected women in the church and society.

3.2 The History and Development of Feminism

The term feminism was coined in the late nineteenth century by Hubertine Auclert. She used this term in 1882 to refer to the struggle of women to gain political rights. The term, however, was not the beginning of women's struggle to make themselves heard (Clifford, 2001:11). This struggle goes back much further in history. *Feminism* is not easy to define and according to Fiorenza (1993:20), it is often confusing because suggesting a definition requires taking a specific political stance. Such a definition depends on how the person suggesting the definition views the past, present and future relationships between women and men in their particular contexts. In general people view a feminist as someone who dislikes and distrusts men but it should be acknowledged that a feminist is in many cases rather someone who seeks equality and greater justice for women (Loades, 2001:5).

Phillips (1999:388) attempts to formulate a definition by saying that *feminism* is a movement that commits itself to women's self-determination and offers alternatives to the prevailing male-dominated political and social structures. It is, however, an extremely diverse movement and Phillips goes on to identify a core feminist conviction that stands amid the diversity. He describes this by saying (Phillips, 1999:389.):

"Woman are 'by nature' neither inferior to nor derivative of men; nor do men 'by nature' embody a normative humanity to which woman are subordinated. Rather, woman's humanity, with its attendant rights and responsibilities, including the authority to interpret sacred texts, must be acknowledged and respected by civil communities."

A feminist is not necessarily someone of the female sex, but will seek change for the better in terms of justice for women and this requires attention to women's perspectives and experiences (Loades, 1998:81). According to Clifford (2001:13), the main reason for the existence of a feminist movement is to end oppression, discrimination, and violence directed against women and to gain full equality and human dignity for every woman.

Feminism developed over many years and the different stages that were of significance are often referred to as "waves". The key events of each wave of feminism will briefly be discussed.

3.2.1 First Wave Feminism

Clifford (2001:11) identifies the following key events spanning more than a century in the development of first wave feminism:

- Mary Wollstonecraft, in England, wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792. Her argument in the introduction of this work is that society as a whole suffers under the burden of a false education gathered from books written on the subject by men who consider females not as human creatures but rather as women.
- Women began to lift their voices to challenge the inferior status of women in the United States at the end of the 1830's. This happened in the midst of women's active participation in the pre-Civil War abolitionist movement.
- The Female Anti-Slavery Society was founded in 1833. This society aimed at creating a natural setting in which the subordination of women could be connected to the oppression of slaves.
- The Women's Movement emerged in the United States with the Grimke sisters playing a leading role. They emphasized why it was appropriate for women to speak publicly in Christian churches about the dehumanizing evil of slavery. As can be concluded they strongly condemned slavery.
- The former slave Sojourner Truth (Isabelle Baumfree) gave her "And Ain't I a Woman" speech (1851) at a women's rights convention in Ohio in which she drew attention to the degradation of female slaves.

- J.S. Mill's *On the Subjection of Women* appeared in 1869. In this work he argues that subordinating one sex to the other is a major hindrance to human improvement and development. Mill also asserts that one cannot know what women naturally are since what is called "natural" is rather an artificial result of forced repression and unnatural stimulation (O'Grady, 1996:xx).
- Elizabeth Cady Stanton pointed out the ways in which the Bible contributed to the subordination of women. She, with some female colleagues, created a biblical commentary called *The Woman's Bible* that was published in 1895.
- Stanton, Lucretia Mott and Susan B. Anthony are the best known contributors for the gaining of legal and economic equality between women and men in the United States. These women's persistency during the mid-nineteenth century eventually led to the right for women to legally own property in the United States.
- Since 1893 several countries gave women the vote, of which New Zealand was the first, Finland the second in 1906 and Russia and Canada the third in 1918. Great Britain, in the same year than Russia and Canada, allowed women over thirty to vote.
- Carrie Chapman Catt, along with some others, aided American women in getting the right to vote in 1920.
- The complete impact of the women who promoted women's right to gain the vote in different countries was only seen many years later. Women in Switzerland, for instance, only gained the right to vote in 1971.
- Although not mentioned by Clifford one could also note the attention drawn to the plight of the working - women after the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century mainly in Europe and the United States (Anon., 2006a).

Before the first wave of feminism started, men assigned to women the role of producing and raising male citizens who would lead society. They did this as they created new political and economic structures. It should therefore be noted that these "structures", which gave men sovereignty in the city square while women had to make a home for them and their children, were created by men (Clifford, 2001:12). The first wave of feminism broadly encompassed the realization of the fact that although society treated men as superior to women they are in reality equal. This realization by women made

them speak up and write works to make others aware of the injustice done to women and their rights.

3.2.2 Second Wave Feminism

After women had gained voting rights in the United States and several other Western countries, the feminist movement declined and virtually halted in the United States. It was not until the 1960's that the second wave of feminism emerged; this time as a broader liberation movement (Clifford, 2001:12). A renewed consciousness among white women started in which they realized that getting the vote had not resolved sexism. During the second wave of feminism, more distinct groups of feminists were formed. Bryson (1999:5) states that the fact that feminists want to liberate women does not mean that there is a united feminist movement; on the contrary, feminists are profoundly and at times bitterly divided over priorities, methods and goals. The following major types of second wave feminism are identified by Clifford (2001:23):

- **Liberal Feminism** emphasizes civil rights. This type of feminism interprets the right to privacy to include the right of women to freely make decisions about their own sexual and reproductive health. They furthermore want women to be fully equal to men in all facets of societal life, especially in economic and political life.
- **Cultural Feminism** emphasizes the moral superiority of women over men as well as the values traditionally associated with women, such as compassion, nurture and peacemaking. By stressing the contributions made by women, they work toward a better society.
- **Radical Feminism** identifies the cause of all societal problems as the pervasiveness of male domination and they emphasize this and the importance of a women-centred culture. This women-centred culture is characterized by closeness to nature, nurture and compassion. This type of feminism seeks to eliminate patriarchy in order to liberate women from male control in every aspect of life, including family life.
- **Socialist Feminism** focuses attention on white male dominance in the economic class struggles of capitalist societies. They are of the opinion that this dominance is the reason for the division of labour according to sex and race and the devaluing of women's work, especially the work of raising children. Their aim is to end the

economic dependence of women on men and to achieve social reforms that will end class divisions and enable all women and men to have the same opportunity to be employed and to be actively involved in parenting.

It can thus be said that Liberal Feminism among its other goals strive towards economic and political equality between men and women, while Socialist Feminism make economic independence of women their aim. Radical feminism in turn wants women to be completely liberated from patriarchy and the oppressive power of men. Cultural Feminism can almost be seen as a "milder" form because it only seeks a better society by focussing on the positive moral contributions that women make.

3.2.3 Third Wave Feminism

The third wave of feminism arose in the late 1970s and it drew attention to differences in race and social class among women. Valdivia (1995:8) adds a significant aspect to his definition of feminism that belongs to the third wave. According to him feminism can broadly be understood as the ending of the oppression of all women, *while acknowledging that there are differences among them*. A new direction in feminism was founded with this realization. Feminist of colour and non-Western cultures emphasized that they have unique experiences and concerns that are connected to their specific social locations. In this wave of feminism, each group seeks the development of its own agendas for liberation that respond to its unique experiences and desires for positive transformation (Clifford, 2001:28). Examples of new groups that were formed as part of third wave feminism are the *Womanist* and the *Mujerista* movements.

The term *Womanist* was coined by the African-American author Alice Walker and a definition thereof includes elements of tradition, community, self and critique of white feminist thought. Jacquelyn Grant (as quoted by Clifford [2001:81]) defines a Womanist as follows:

"one who has developed survival strategies in spite of the oppression of her race and sex in order to save her family and her people".

Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz is a Cuban American who introduced the term "Mujerista" to name the group of Hispanic women in the United States that work towards liberation (Clifford, 2001:81).

To conclude with third-wave feminism, it can be said that this movement was far more focused on minority groups and the marginalised. Schneiders (2000:8), however, summarizes it effectively by saying the following:

"This movement is concerned not simply with the social, political, and economic equality of women with men but with a fundamental re-imagination of the whole of humanity in relation to the whole of reality, including non-human creation. In other words, the feminist consciousness has gradually deepened, the feminist agenda has widened, from a concern to right a particular structural wrong, namely, the exclusion of women from the voting booth, to a demand for full participation of women in society and culture, to an ideal of recreating humanity itself according to patterns of eco-justice, that is, of right relations at every level and in relation to all of reality."

3.3 Feminism in Theology

We should now reflect on the impact that the feminism phenomenon has on the study of the Bible and theology in general. Feminist theology in its moderate sense does not shrink from criticizing the many ways in which, throughout history of the Christian church, women have not been treated as the equals of men in aptness for religious instruction, for serving as ministers of the gospel and leaders of the church, and for influencing how the gospel ought to be translated (Carmody, 1995:xi).

Feminist theology according to Lancaster (2002:1) was born struggling with Scripture. The Bible has been read by women for centuries. Reading the Scriptures self-consciously as women, however, is a more recent phenomenon. Reading self-consciously as women involves directing questions to it from women's experiences of the family and their place in societal and religious structures (Ackermann, 1998:350). From very early on feminists recognized how the situation of women was bound up with certain pre-understandings

about women and men and that these were often rooted in the Bible. As the feminist consciousness grew, women were faced with the question of how to respond to the Bible.

Lancaster (2002:1) identifies three responses amongst Christian women in this struggle with understanding the Bible. Some women continue to accept the authority of the Bible without question. They remain in the church without change in attitude and action. On the opposite end of the spectrum others leave Christianity completely because of the belief that the Bible and Christianity are irredeemably patriarchal. Yet a third group remains participants in Christianity, accepting the Bible's authority but seeking transformation of the church and of the way it understands its sacred text. It is this third group that will enjoy specific attention in this study. Before responses to the Bible by women can be viewed, however, the history of how women gained authority to interpret the Bible should first be explored.

3.3.1 The History of Women Gaining Authority to Interpret the Bible

Just like the general struggle for women to be liberated, feminism in Bible interpretation also started early on. Feminism in hermeneutics is rooted in seventeenth century Europe and America and it can be assigned to women's struggle not only to preach and teach the Bible but also to free the world from slavery. Several events throughout history played a key role in the development of women's reading of the Bible. The first step to the freedom of a leading role in the church was as basic as gaining authority to interpret the Bible as women. Phillips (1999:389-390) explains the following stages in which women seek to gain authority to interpret the Bible:

- Seventeenth century: Because of the impact of the Protestant Reformation, Christian women claimed authority to teach and preach the Bible. The reformation insisted that individual believers can interpret Scripture for themselves and this included women. They justified their authority to interpret as being faithful to God's command to proclaim the gospel. Unfortunately, many were persecuted and even martyred for taking this 'daring' step.

- Eighteenth century: The Great Awakening with its emphasis on individual conversion and salvation helped women to become active members in religious communities. They led prayers, testified and preached. It is also during this century that the rise of Pentecostalism and Charismatic groups occurred.
- Nineteenth century: Women began to contest men's interpretation of certain biblical texts as justifying women's subordination. The first woman that was ordained in any Christian denomination was A. Brown Blackwell (1825-1921), who was ordained in 1853 but a year later resigned the full-time ministry. Stanton produced *The Women's Bible* (1895) to provoke women to examine Scripture for themselves. Women and men began to examine the nature and gender of God. Christian Science, which was founded by a woman and added a Mother God to their belief, gave women the opportunity to become leaders, healers and missionaries.
- Twentieth century: Women were admitted to theological schools and seminaries. They were trained as professional biblical scholars. The women's liberation movement, which began in the late 1960's and is described above as second wave feminism, helped women to gain ground. Feminist biblical studies emerged as an academic discipline. The first book by a female professional biblical scholar in support of feminist concerns was written by Crook in 1964.
- Twenty-first century: As greater numbers of women are taking up biblical studies, some fundamental questions need to be asked:
 - *How is the diversity of feminist standpoints to be negotiated?*
 - *What is the relationship between feminist cultural criticism and feminist theological hermeneutics?*
 - *What is the relationship between academic feminist scholars and feminists outside of academia?*

It should be noted that the second question is of special significance for the present study.

3.3.2 A history of Significant Religious Writings written by Feminists

With the growing awareness among women of their unjust place in society, came also the realization that in the past the Bible was often used as a weapon to keep women subordinated. Women started to produce religious writings to try and justify a better place

and later a leading role in the church and society. Some of these texts were of great significance and should therefore be noted when one discusses feminist Bible interpretation.

Margaret Fell Fox wrote a primary resource for the biblical passages from Genesis to Revelation to which seventeenth-century women appealed for vindication. Published in 1667 it was called *Women's Speaking Justified* (Phillips, 1999:389). A. Brown Blackwell, the first ordained woman, composed an exegesis of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12 that was published by Oberlin as an essay in 1849. In this essay she argued that these texts applied only to the historical context in which they were written and they were not intended to silence women in the church for all times (Phillips, 1999:389).

In 1895 the first part of *The Woman's Bible* was published in the United States. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who was the main contributor, stated in its preface that the aim was to revise those texts and chapters of the Scriptures that refer directly to women and exclude them (Ackermann, 1998:350). The complete *The Woman's Bible* was published in 1895 and 1898. According to Thiselton (1992:435), Stanton broadly anticipated what he labels socio-critical hermeneutics because her motivation for the production of this work sprang from her awareness that biblical texts can be used for the social control and manipulation of women and their social roles.

In Crook's 1964 work, which was referred to above, she concluded that men formulate religion, approved it and directed it. Shortly after Crook's book, Mary Daly's *The Church and the Second Sex* appeared in 1968. This work had an explicit reliance on feminist theory and placed core feminist issues on the scholarly theological table. These issues included the theological and historical problems of women in patriarchal religions, the hermeneutical dimension of biblical authority as well as the role of feminist theory as a theoretical resource for religious studies (Phillips, 1999:390).

According to Ackermann (1998:351), the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s gave rise to a renewed interest in reading the Scriptures from a female perspective in North America. Letty Russell was responsible for editing *The Liberating Word: A Guide to Nonsexist Interpretation of the Bible* in 1976 and *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* by Phyllis Trible appeared in 1978 (Ackermann, 1998:351). Feminist Biblical studies finally emerged as an academic discipline in the 1980s (Phillips, 1999:390).

The 1980s witnessed a flood of studies and Thiselton (1992:437) lists the following primary sources for feminist hermeneutical theory during this period:

- Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza: *In Memory of Her* (1983) and *Bread not Stone* (1984)
- Mary Anne Tolbert: *The Bible and feminist Hermeneutics* (1983)
- Letty Russel: *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (1985)
- Adela Yarbro Collins (ed.): *Feminist Perspectives in Biblical Scholarship* (1985)
- Alice Laffey: *Wives, Harlots and Concubines: The Old Testament in Feminist Perspective* (1988 and 1990)

Many books, essays and articles by feminist writers have appeared since. Theologians like Rosemary Ruether, Fiorenza and Trible have made very significant contributions to the field of feminist hermeneutics since the 1980s. This section thus shed a little light on the feminist literature on Bible interpretation that appeared from the seventeenth century to today. In the next chapter specific attention will be paid to Phyllis Trible and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza who each has an own unique approach to biblical texts.

3.4 Feminist Interpretation

Now that we have a background of the history of feminism and feminism in Bible interpretation, we can explore the meaning of and approaches within feminist hermeneutics. The following statement by Sawyer (1990:231) serves as a good introduction to this topic: "Feminist interpretation of the Bible offers an alternative assessment of the biblical evidence as seen through the eyes and experience of women readers and theologians." According to Trible (1984:3), feminist hermeneutics is a

prophetic movement, examining the status quo, pronouncing judgement and calling for repentance by engaging with Scripture in various ways.

It has been mentioned that feminist theology is closely related in some of its concerns and methods to liberation theology. Feminist writers, however, write for themselves rather than in defence of the oppressed and they are more concerned with oppression in terms of gender. It is only in third wave feminism that specific class concerns are also entering the fray. When it comes to offering a strong critique of the patriarchal ideologies of the biblical writers and responding to a present-day cultural issue, feminist and liberation theology has to face the challenging task of working between the world of the Bible and the world in which we live (Gillingham, 1998:141).

There are many differences among feminist biblical scholars. Newport (1996:139) explains that some seek simply to explore biblical characters, books and themes that are relevant to the modern woman's situation. Others read the complete text from a female perspective to see what differences there are between the way a woman understands the text and the way that a man understands the text. A third group reads the Bible as women in order to speak-up against the myth of patriarchy. They want to expose the Bible as a possible tool of oppression against woman. In order to do feminist Bible interpretation one must read and understand the Bible from the standpoint of a feminist theory of justice and a feminist movement for change (Fiorenza, 2001b:1).

In all the major areas of Christian theology today, feminists are proposing an alternative to the existing ways of interpretation in order to remove the harmful effects of traditional patriarchy and accommodate the insights of women. By doing so, feminist theologians want the church and society at large, to benefit explicitly from the contributions of half the race that experiences God in a female body (Carmody, 1995:66). Fiorenza (1985c:55) explains this by saying that in traditional hermeneutics man was the paradigmatic subject of scientific knowledge and interpretation while women were defined as *the other* or the object of male interpretation. Feminist interpreters insist, however, on the re-

conceptualisation of our language as well as our intellectual frameworks so that women as well as men are subjects of interpretation.

3.5 How Developments in Hermeneutics are related to Women

According to Phillips (1999:391), traditional Christian exegesis shows that women are subordinated to and derivative of men in the order of creation and that a woman's purpose is fulfilled in her relationship to her husband. Bible passages like the second creation story in Genesis 2:4b-3:24, the author's (Paul?) affirmation of men's headship in 1 Timothy 2:11-14, women's speaking in church being prohibited in 1 Corinthians 14:35-35 and women being taught to obey their husbands (Ephesians 5:22-24; Colossians 3:18-19; 1 Peter 3:1-6) were all interpreted in such a way that people believe women's authority must be surrendered to their husbands and so to men in general (Phillips, 1999:391). This resulted in women not being allowed to interpret, teach and preach from the Bible. If these passages are interpreted with another approach, it becomes clear that the same conclusion cannot be reached.

It can therefore be said that there is a direct correlation between biblical hermeneutics and the role of women in the church. Women realised this correlation and started to interpret the Bible from a female perspective, which resulted in what is known as *feminist biblical interpretation*.

Reference was made to the diversity that can be found in feminism in general and therefore also in feminist interpretation. The three major groupings within this field, namely Revolutionary Feminism, Reformist Feminism and Reconstructionist Feminism, should now briefly receive our attention.

3.5.1 Revolutionary Feminist Theology

This group can as a matter of fact be described as post-Christian. Most of these women have been part of Christianity at some stage but their feminist consciousness led them to the conclusion that Christianity is irredeemably patriarchal and often in opposition to women. The main problem that these women have with the Bible is the centrality given

to the revelation of a male God by Christian churches. Furthermore, they are of the opinion that Christians continue to subordinate women in their churches and marital relationships. They conclude Christianity is oppressive to women and should be abandoned (Clifford, 2001:32). Revolutionary feminists thus believe that the Judaeo-Christian tradition is so intrinsically biased in favour of the male, and so fundamentally patriarchal, that it has to be rejected completely (Keane, 1998:123).

3.5.2 Reformist Christian Feminist Theology

Reformist feminist theologians have almost nothing in common with revolutionary feminist theologians. The reformist approach does not look for major changes to revolutionise Christianity; neither do they want to replace the God as revealed in the flesh by Jesus Christ. They are looking for modest changes within existing church structures. They share a commitment to the Christian tradition. Some followers of this form of feminist theology believe that they can solve the problems of women's secondary status with measures such as better translations of the Bible and more emphasis on egalitarian passages in the Bible. They are of opinion that permitting women to hold church offices and do church-related ministries will help restore the woman's place in the church (Clifford, 2001:33).

3.5.3 Reconstructionist Christian Feminist Theology

This group of theologians shares with reformist feminism a commitment to Christianity and they see the Bible as the means of reconstructing a positive Christian theology for women, while at the same time they reject most of the Christian tradition regarding the role of woman in- and outside of the church (Sawyer, 1990:232). Reconstructionist feminist theologians seek a liberating theological core for women within the Christian tradition, while also working towards a deeper transformation or reconstruction not only of their church structures but also of civil society (Clifford, 2001:33).

The reconstructionist biblical scholars that are best known include Rosemary Radford Ruether, Phyllis Trible and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Ruether sees feminism as part of a general movement of liberation for all, both male and female, who are subjected to

oppression (Sawyer, 1990:232). To her, the appeal to women's experience is of the utmost importance because it is precisely women's experience that has been shut out of hermeneutics (Thiselton, 1992:433). According to Loades (1998:82), this approach to feminist interpretation proceeds on the assumption that all, thus not just women, stand to gain from this movement. Ruether as well as Fiorenza rediscover the centrality of women in the Christian gospel. For this study particular attention will be paid to two of the above mentioned reformist feminist theologians, namely Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Phyllis Trible. Their approaches will be noted in the next chapter.

3.5.4 Approaches within Reconstructionist Feminist Biblical Interpretation

Fiorenza (1983:6) argues that feminist hermeneutics is a type of liberation theology and she goes further by saying, "all theology, willingly or not, is by definition always engaged for or against the oppressed". Fiorenza discovered that female subordination was not part of the original gospel but rather the result of the church's eventual compromise with Graeco-Roman society (Sawyer, 1990:243).

Trible (1978:5-8) identifies the re-contextualisation of biblical texts within the framework of a tradition as the first hermeneutical issue to be addressed. Her method is derived from rhetorical criticism as expounded by James Muilenburg (cf. Muilenburg, 1969). "How the text speaks and what it says belong together in the discovery of what it is", Trible (1978:9) writes. Her view is that male and female life originates with God and therefore they are equal.

Fiorenza makes use of a more historical orientated approach to the Bible while Trible takes an explicit literary approach when interpreting the Scriptures. Both of them have done significant work in terms of the liberation of women in the church and society.

3.6 Summary

This section explained the history of, and developments in feminism as well as in feminist theology and hermeneutics. It was seen that women have been struggling to get a

proper place in the church and society for years and that they have accomplished many victories in this regard up to date.

Feminist Bible interpretation has resulted in extreme as well as in moderate views. The reconstructionist feminists have further liberation to offer for women in the church today. In the next section specific attention will be paid to Fiorenza and Tribble's work. A comparison will be drawn between these two feminist theologians. Once the differences and similarities in their approaches have been discovered, these will be evaluated. Particular attention will then be given to how their main arguments regarding interpretation can be applied to restore women to their rightful place in the modern day church.

4 Two Approaches within Feminist Biblical Interpretation

4.1 Introduction

The emphasis of the previous chapters was on the development of hermeneutics and especially feminist hermeneutics in theology. This provided us with a background against which the focus of the present chapter can be viewed. The aim of this chapter is to explore the work and views of two feminist theologians, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Phyllis Trible. Fiorenza pays attention to a historical approach while Trible employs a literary approach. They share a commitment to use the Bible to ensure the rightful place of women in the church and furthermore in society. Specific attention will be paid to their approaches and the views expressed in their work. In concluding this chapter Fiorenza and Trible's work will be compared to see how their approaches differ and in what ways they agree.

4.2 Fiorenza and the Historical Approach

4.2.1 Fiorenza's Life and Background

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza can most certainly be viewed as one of the key contributors when it comes to the field of feminist theology. She has intensely experienced the oppression and subordination of women in the church and in society herself and it takes a woman of courage to achieve what Fiorenza has done in terms of not only feminist hermeneutics but also in terms of seeking women's rightful place in society. Although she is viewed as a German-born American by many, she replied that she is a "resident alien" when asked in an interview if she thinks of herself as an American or a German (Segovia, 2003:23). She was actually born in Romania in 1938, but because of the Second World War her family moved to central Germany early in her life and she views the flight from her hometown as significant because when they flew across a range of mountains she suddenly realized that the horizon was not the edge of the world as she has believed until then. "That", she says "was my beginning as a theologian; you could say that the landscape and its changing horizons had a hermeneutical effect on me" (Segovia, 2003:2).

Fiorenza is a Catholic scholar who became the first woman in Würzburg, Germany, to complete the full academic program in theology that male students for the priesthood were required to take (Clifford, 2001:62). During her studies one of the lecturers told Fiorenza that as a woman she has no future in theology (Segovia, 2003:7). This gives an idea of the circumstances under which she had to study. She completed her studies successfully, however, in 1962.

Fiorenza moved to the United States of America at the beginning of the 1970s because according to her "there was no possibility of work in Germany for me as a theologian" (Segovia, 2003:10). Clifford (2001:62) also mentions the important fact that Fiorenza became the first woman president of the Society of Biblical Literature in 1987. She spent most of her academic career in North American institutions. She taught at the University of Notre Dame, the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and at the Harvard Divinity School, where she is the Krister Stendahl Professor of Divinity (Clifford, 2001:62).

Fiorenza has written many works that are of great value to the field of feminist hermeneutics as mentioned in the previous chapter. She is best known for her book *In Memory for Her. A Feminist Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (1983). She wrote at least eight other books and edited several more. Furthermore she is the co-editor of the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* and the editor of *Concilium*, an international scholarly journal (Clifford, 2001:62).

One of the major focuses in her work has been on women in the church. Since her first book, she has consistently argued for a reformation of ecclesiology that would give proper attention to the ministry women have done and are doing in the church. She is a critical historian and has developed and applied feminist hermeneutical theory to biblical sources. She critically appraises cultural understandings of gender and the role of patriarchy in all its facets. She has always been critical of male dominated academy that has marginalized women and their contributions to Christian history (Clifford, 2001:62).

4.2.2 Defining patriarchy

Since patriarchy is such a central theme against which Fiorenza aims her work, it should be clear what it encompasses in Fiorenza's understanding, hence this discussion now deals with this aspect. Since she wrote *In Memory of Her*, Fiorenza has widened her theoretical range in a deeper recognition of the various dimensions of domination that structure human reality and through which women inhabit a variety of locations that is determined by class, race, sexual orientation, family status and other determinants (Hewitt, 2003:449). One of the ways in which she does this is by broadening the concept of patriarchy.

Fiorenza (1993:359) states that patriarchy is defined in Western feminist theory as the social structures and ideologies that have enable men to dominate and exploit women throughout recorded history. It can therefore be defined in terms of male-female gender-dualism and men oppressing women can be seen in the most fundamental oppression.

For Fiorenza patriarchalism in the New Testament is a distortion of Jesus' view as initiating an egalitarian community. She places the Jesus movement in the context of the Jewish world, although she is aware of the anti-Semitic mentality in favour of Christianity (Fiorenza, 1983:106). She points out that although the Jewish world was predominantly patriarchal, the situation of women was not that bad. She gives such examples as the Jewish women at Elephantine actively taking part in religious life (Fiorenza, 1983:109). Even in the Graeco-Roman world, the law allowed women to own and administer property. The Epicureans and Isis worshippers regarded men and women as equal. This ethos of democracy was resisted by patriarchalism (Fiorenza, 1983:198).

Ng (2002:9) explains Fiorenza's view on patriarchy by saying that black feminists in religion have argued that women of subordinated races and classes are often more oppressed by white women of a higher social order than by men of their own standing. For this reason Fiorenza has moved away from the notion to define patriarchy as simply in terms of men dominating women. Since 1985 she considers "patriarchy" more in the classical Greek sense which implies the domination of elite men owning property over

women and other men subordinated to and dependent on them. In such a view the oppression of gender, race, class and colonialism are inter-locked with its focal point on women at the bottom of the socio-political and religious pyramid. It is therefore not only a matter of men oppressing women, but also other men of lower standing.

For Fiorenza the oppression of women is not “natural” but “social”. She has the opinion that the problem is not physical (biological) sex differences but that the patriarchal household and marriage relationships caused the political inferiority of women (Fiorenza, 1985c:58). Since her 1963 thesis she has maintained that there is no essence of womanhood as such. She has the notion that women can anytime be interchanged with men in any group and that any member of the group – in principal- have equal access to authority, leadership and power (Fiorenza, 1996:56).

In her more recent writings Fiorenza stresses the gap between reality and the idea that all are equal. There is an ongoing conflict and struggle between the emancipation of especially women on the one hand and those of the patriarchal (“patri-kyriachal”) social system on the other. She admits that the writings on the early Church indicate such a struggle, but she goes to pains to avoid the misunderstanding that her reconstruction of this struggle is a factual description of the early Christian beginnings (Ng, 2002:12).

4.2.3 Fiorenza's View on Feminist Theology and Hermeneutics

4.2.3.1 Fiorenza and Feminist Theology

Fiorenza does not agree with mainstream (or “malestream” as she [Fiorenza, 1984:107] sometimes refers to it) biblical scholarship because it is embedded in the 19th century understanding as defined by Von Ranke, who maintained that history is a record of what actually happened in the past. This is not acceptable to Fiorenza because each historian has his/her own model, method and interest especially for a dominant group of society for whom they are mainly writing (Ng, 2002:11).

It can therefore be understood that the subtitle of her work *In Memory of Her*, is a “feminist reconstruction of Christian origins”. In her reconstruction of these early

origins, it is her feminist theological perspective that provides the critical order by which all biblical tradition is gathered together in a historical model. She believes that all historians work with models as tools to order experiences of the past. She and other feminist theologians have to critically analyze these models underlying accounts of early Christian beginnings so as to change and replace them (Ng, 2002:22).

Fiorenza argues that transformation and raising consciousness should be the main objectives of theologising (Pushpa, 2004:66). According to Hamington (1995:38), Christian Feminism offers as one of its critiques of patriarchal religion the lack of responsiveness to the daily experience of the faithful. Fiorenza (as quoted in Hamington, 1995:38) states the following regarding this:

“Feminist theologians maintain that theology has to become again communal and holistic. Feminist theology expresses itself not only in abstract analysis and intellectual discussion, but it employs the whole range of human expression...”

Fiorenza, with several other Catholic feminists, is also in support of making use of feminist theology to merely reclaim their Church. Fiorenza (as quoted in Hamington, 1995:179) says the following in this regard:

“Rather than to abandon Christian faith and community as inherently oppressive to women, we seek to reclaim the power of Christian faith and community for the liberation and wholeness of all, women and men.”

4.2.3.2 Fiorenza and Feminist Hermeneutics

Fiorenza (1992:9-11) uses the metaphor of dance to characterize feminist biblical interpretation. She uses this metaphor to indicate that she seeks to evoke freedom of movement, creativity and a uniqueness of expression (Wainwright, 1999:345). Feminist hermeneutics refer to the theory, art and practice of interpretation of biblical and ancient extra-biblical texts in the interest of women (Fiorenza, 1996:99). Fiorenza argues that feminist hermeneutics are as a matter of fact liberation hermeneutics as well. She is of opinion that "all theology, willingly or not, is by definition always engaged for or against the oppressed" (Fiorenza, 1983:6). The approach to hermeneutics is exemplary of the

hermeneutical shift that is sought by Christian feminist (Hamington, 1995:46). Fiorenza's (1984:13) statement regarding Bible interpretation explains it:

"A feminist critical interpretation of the Bible cannot take as its point of departure the normative authority of the biblical archetype, but must begin with women's experience in their struggle for liberation."

According to Fiorenza (1984:13), a feminist critical hermeneutics seek to assess the function of the Bible in terms of women's liberation and wholeness. Fiorenza does this by presenting the case for feminist re-interpretation of Scripture against traditional hermeneutical patterns and by so doing she seeks what she calls a "critical re-appropriation of the past" (Fiorenza, 1983:42). She recognizes that not only the culture at the time of writing but also the dominant culture through which interpretation takes place determines the message of Scripture. She further finds the historical use of the Bible to be a variety of interpretations that have resulted in positive and negative outcomes (Fiorenza, 1983:146).

Ng (2002:13) identifies the four main objectives that Fiorenza has in her feminist hermeneutics as follows:

- Critical Theory: Fiorenza appreciates the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, which is very helpful because it also criticizes and represses that which is experienced as alienation and oppression (Fiorenza, 1975:62).
- Liberational Hermeneutics: She shares the ideas of the liberational theologies, which have the insight that all theology is always, engaged for or against the oppressed (Fiorenza, 1983:6).
- Rhetorical Criticism: She often uses the term to denote the approach of a communication that links knowledge with action and passion (Fiorenza, 1992:46).
- Woman-centered Approach: Fiorenza finds liberation theologies not critical enough of patriarchy as oppressive to women. Thus she insists on putting the liberation of women at the center of her thinking. The biblical text is to be examined to see whether the text builds a "women-church" or "ekklesia gynaikon" – an expression coined by Fiorenza (1984:8) and which will be explored later in this chapter.

In *Women of Spirit* (1979) that was edited by Rosemary Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin, Fiorenza re-examines literature of the second and third centuries (Thiselton, 1992:432). From this she concludes that because of patriarchal bias, the dominant interpreters and transmitters of early tradition "transmitted only a fraction of the rich traditions about significant women and their contribution in early Christianity" (Fiorenza, 1979:466). She elaborates on this by saying that the Bible is "authored by men, written in androcentric language, reflective of male experience, selected and transmitted by male religious leadership" (Fiorenza, 1985b:130). It is for this reason that Fiorenza comes to the conclusion that biblical writings cannot provide a transcontextual critical principle, and that the needed critical dimension emerges from the experience of women (Thiselton, 1992:443). By taking the experience and analysis that are articulated in feminist struggles to transform patriarchy as its point of departure, Fiorenza (1992:198) states that feminist biblical interpretation seeks to develop methods for contesting the patriarchal values encoded in Scripture.

It is of value to note that Fiorenza's (2001b:3) understanding of a feminist reading "is one that employs a systematic and critical analysis and avoids interpretations that re-inscribe cultural and religious stereotypes, which are not favourable for the free growth and flowering of women. In addition, a feminist theoretical framework seeks to enable readers to become subjects of interpretation and to give them tools for engaging in a feminist approach when reading and interpreting texts".

Castelli (2004:44) notes that many writers attempt to place Fiorenza's work in various intellectual lineages to which gesture Fiorenza (1998:72) has critiqued several times but specifically when she observes:

"My theoretical-theological framework and proposal is usually assessed as to whether and how much it is stamped by or in line with the intellectual tradition of the 'great men' or 'fathers' of hermeneutics, rhetorics, or dogmatics. Whereas reviewers have suggested that the intellectual framework of my work is articulated in dialogue with or dependence on one or other of the 'masters' of hermeneutics, such as Gadamer, Bultmann, Ricoeur, the Frankfurt School, Dworkin, or the American pragmatist philosophical tradition, they have not inquired as to its intellectual 'foresisters'."

Fiorenza's purpose for developing feminist hermeneutics is to enable women to be part of the critical reconstruction of meanings in religion from the view and standpoint of women's experience, especially the experience of struggle against dehumanization and oppression (Clifford, 2001:55). Fiorenza (1998:72) elaborates on the above quote by saying that such an evaluation of feminist work in terms of malestream hermeneutical discourses neglects that feminists have a different and independent theory. Fiorenza (1984:15) suggests four strategies, which are widely used by feminist biblical scholars and they are:

- a hermeneutics of suspicion,
- a hermeneutics of remembrance,
- a hermeneutics of proclamation and
- a hermeneutics of actualization.

Since Fiorenza's approach to her work is of importance and significant to this study, each of these aspects will now be discussed in more detail.

The idea of a **hermeneutics of suspicion** comes from Paul Ricoeur, as was seen in chapter two of this study, but this approach was later employed significantly by Fiorenza, Rosemary Ruether and Judith Plaskow. A hermeneutics of suspicion involves the view that the conventional constructions of the history of biblical interpretation do not represent value-neutral descriptions of biblical history, traditions and texts (Thiselton, 1992:431).

First and foremost a feminist hermeneutics of suspicion is a consciousness-raising activity that requires one to take into account the influences of culturally determined gender roles and attitudes in the Bible. It can also include systematic analysis that seeks to uncover its causes in biblical society, church and academy (Clifford, 2001:56). The starting point from where it functions is the assumption that biblical texts and their interpretations are androcentric and serve functions that are determined by patriarchy (Fiorenza, 1984:15). Biblical texts and interpretations therefore need to be examined for possible androcentric assumptions and positions. This includes how texts from the Bible treat women in stories or how it neglects women's experience completely. To summarize

a hermeneutics of suspicion therefore, one can say that it is not only concerned with what is said about women but also what is said through their silences (Clifford, 2001:56).

Ostriker's (1993:122) version of a hermeneutics of suspicion is that the reader reads a text of power but through the eyes of the powerless, which can result in a variety of ways that register anger and resentment, the adversarial position.

Fiorenza (1983:32) claims that "the revelatory canon for theological evaluation of biblical androcentric traditions and the subsequent interpretations cannot be derived from the Bible itself but can only be formulated in and through women's struggle for liberation from all patriarchal oppression". According to Green (2000:203), however, this statement reflects a hermeneutics of suspicion that is at work theologically and it is not grounded in the biblical paradigm since it subjects the paradigm itself to suspicion. Green (2000:204) continues by indicating that if there are good grounds for a critique of patriarchy, which according to him there most surely are, they require a hermeneutics whose suspicion is grounded in an underlying trust in the crucified Christ and the God who raised him from the dead.

A hermeneutics of remembrance is the other side of the feminist interpretative coin and it belongs together with a hermeneutic of suspicion. Hermeneutics of suspicion is in fact in service of hermeneutics of remembrance (Clifford, 2001:56). With a hermeneutic of remembrance the past suffering of women, and those who were subjugated through enslavement, exile and persecution, are reclaimed and treated as a 'dangerous memory' which invites us to solidarity toward everyone who struggled for human dignity whether in the past or present. Many of these memories are also 'subversive' because in the midst of crises, biblical figures reason to be agents for liberation, because of their relationship with God (Fiorenza, 1984:20). Fiorenza (1984:20) simplifies this by saying that a feminist hermeneutics of remembrance has as its primary task to keep the *memoria passionis* (memory of the Passion) for biblical women alive as well as to reclaim our biblical heritage.

Clifford (2001:56) summarizes by saying that a hermeneutic of remembrance does not negate the dehumanizing effects of patriarchy on biblical history, and neither does it give the definitive and final word. The Bible and other extra-biblical sources from the same time, provide rich resources for constructing a theology for our time that heals suffering and liberates from struggle.

According to Ng (2002:14) it is not surprising that Fiorenza advocates a **hermeneutics of proclamation** when one takes into account her emphasis on rhetoric and her ambivalent attitude towards the Bible. It can therefore almost be seen as natural for her to suggest "those texts that are identified as transcending their patriarchal contexts and as articulating a liberating vision of human freedom and wholeness should receive their proper place in the liturgy and teaching of the churches" (Fiorenza, 1984:18). It should also be noted that she is of opinion that the texts that do not meet the above mentioned criteria "should not be retained in the lectionary and be proclaimed in Christian worship or catechesis" (Fiorenza, 1984:19). Fiorenza (1984:18) explains that a hermeneutics of proclamation assesses theological significance of the Bible and its power for the contemporary community of faith.

Fiorenza (1984:21) indicates that a **hermeneutics of actualization** seeks to retell and reformulate biblical stories from a feminist perspective so that a narrative can be created in which the feminist remnants that have survived in patriarchal texts can be amplified. This approach to the text reclaims for the church the imaginative freedom, creativity and ritual powers of women. According to Fiorenza (1984:21), "Only by reclaiming our religious imagination and our sacred powers of naming can women-church dream new dreams and see new visions."

4.2.3.3 Fiorenza's view on Historical Criticism

A historical reading in Fiorenza's (1992:197) view, seeks the "original" meaning of the text while its androcentric symbolic world construction is traced by narrative analysis. According to Fiorenza (1983:68), a feminist reconstruction of history cannot take for granted the accuracy of the accounts that exist because biblical texts are not history

books. The Bible tells us how the religious significance of the accounts was *understood* rather than how it actually *was*. Therefore, the fact that a modern reinterpretation of biblical events is consistent with the Christian tradition of religious interpretation or hermeneutics is revealed by historical criticism (Hamington, 1995:65). Fiorenza, nevertheless, does not abandon critical historiography but rather deepens her critical understanding of it. She still looks at the text as a text and she continues to use historical critical exegesis especially to expose the androcentricity of the text and making the women's history visible (Fiorenza, 1983:152). According to Fiorenza (2001a:7), the transmitters and writers of the gospels were not concerned with simply writing down what was said and done by Jesus but they rather attempted to comprehend what He meant to his first followers and what meaning his life and ministry had for their own time and communities. If this is true, then history must be taken into consideration in interpreting the Bible. Fiorenza (2001a:8) elaborates on this by saying that the focus should be on the individual in a text to the context, rhetorical world and audience in which a text is created.

Fiorenza (1985c:53) mentions three criteria for publicly testing historical knowledge:

“First, to what extent have relevant sources been utilized and how much has the present state of research been considered? Second, how much has the account reached an optimal plausible integration of all available historical information? Third, how logically rigorous, consistent and coherent are the explanatory heuristic models used, and are they reasonably free from self-contradictions? Explanatory models must be 'adequate' to the historical object under consideration.”

Fiorenza (1992:90) disagrees with the postmodernist view that historical reconstructions are totally relative and that it is not possible to access the truth in an objective way. For her it is mostly possible and furthermore, feminists have a less distorted understanding of the world compared to men who are in the “master position” and thus see all things in distortion. In this Fiorenza has not changed her mind over the years (Ng, 2002:12).

According to Hewitt (2003:447) Fiorenza releases individual biblical women from the "objectivity" of identity of thinking, which conceals and distorts their historical agency in

sexist identifications of women as less than human. She does this by writing about them; an example of this is the Syrophoenician woman who Jesus treats, in Fiorenza's (1992:11) view, with "religious prejudice and exclusivist identity".

4.2.3.4 Fiorenza and the Goddess

The lack of female deity imagery has caused feminists to refer to a female Goddess named Sophia. In identifying Jesus' God in the Gestalt of "Divine Woman Wisdom" (Fiorenza, 1983:132) Fiorenza emphasizes the attributes of Sophia's gracious caring for the weak and the helpless and service to the poor and the tired as associated with those feminine attributes that have become marginalized or lost in male-centered language for Jesus and God (Hewitt, 2003:453). The Sophia-God is a God "of all inclusive love, letting the sun shine and rain fall equally on the righteous and sinners" (Fiorenza, 1983:131). The graciousness of God is seen in parables such as the man searching for his lost sheep, or the woman searching for her lost coin. Jesus depicts God as a woman searching for one of her coins, as a woman looking for money that is very important to her. In this God's own concern with sinners and outcasts is articulated (Pushpa, 2004:61). This is considered of great importance and Fiorenza, as quoted by Hamington (1995:105), explains it as follows:

"Even though any Catholic school child can explain on an intellectual-theological level the difference between the worship of God and Christ and the veneration of Mary, on an emotional, imaginative, experiential level, the Catholic child experiences the love of God in the figure of a woman."

Fiorenza is, however, cautious not to emphasize the concept of the Goddess only because she wishes to avoid a simple dualism in which the divine is portrayed exclusively as female.

4.2.3.5 The Jesus Movement and a Discipleship of Equals

According to Fiorenza (1984:132), Jesus probably saw him as the Spirit-filled prophet or Child of divine Sophia (wisdom). Jesus, like her, extends his invitation to all, not only the select few, but also the poor, sick, sinners and prostitutes. Jesus wants the wholeness of all (Fiorenza, 1984:122). Fiorenza maintains that Jesus probably liberated the patriarchal

structures of the Jewish society. It was also the Galilean women who played a leading role in extending the Jesus-movement to the gentiles even after the crucifixion. So there is a solid theological basis for acknowledging women as full disciples (Fiorenza, 1984:137).

4.2.3.6 Fiorenza and the *Ekklesia* of Women

According to Castelli (2004:36) Fiorenza produced a feminist theoretical vision that became a classic within Christian feminist theological writing and in which the *ekklesia* (church/assembly) of women occupies a central and critical place. This *ekklesia* of women is the product of a process of critical re-imagining and imaginative projection. The past, as well as the present are critically reconceived in the service of a transformative and hopeful vision for a possible future (Castelli, 2004:37). In her address at the Call to Action annual gathering in 1998, Maceoin (1998:6) cites Fiorenza explaining as follows:

"The best translation of *ekklesia* is not church. Rather it must be understood in terms of political notions of a public assembly or as a democratic congress of decision-making citizens."

Fiorenza (1985b:128) has a complex view on the path to revelation and according to her "the locus or place of divine revelation and grace is not the Bible...but the *ekklesia* of women and the lives of women who live the 'option for our women selves'." Fiorenza (1985b:126) explains this *ekklesia*, that she also calls the "women-church", as a "movement of self-identified women and women-identified men in biblical religion". It seems as if Fiorenza views this community as one, which is committed to a particular agenda (Thiselton, 1992:442). She indicates that this agenda or goal of the 'women-church' is "not simply the 'full humanity' of women since humanity as we know it is male defined, but women's self-affirmation, power and liberation from all patriarchal alienation, marginalization and oppression" (Fiorenza, 1985:126). "Since women in a patriarchal church cannot decide their own theological-religious affairs and that of their own people, the *ekklesia* of women is as much a future hope as it is a reality today" (Fiorenza, 1983:344).

Castelli (2004:37) is of opinion that Fiorenza's framing of the *ekklesia* serves as a multivalent category for simultaneously describing a sociopolitical communal formation in the past and present as well as a critical idea whose full liberatory potential remains as yet unrealized. Fiorenza (1984:xiv) says, "When as a Christian I use the expression "women-church", I do not use it as an exclusionary but as a political oppositional term to patriarchy".

4.2.3.7 Fiorenza's View on the Ordination of Women

Due to her Catholic background Fiorenza focuses specifically on the ordination of women in the Catholic Church and her viewpoints should be adjusted later to make it more applicable in the context of the Reformed Churches. Hamington (1995:113) is of opinion that Mary's divinity and women's ordination in the Catholic Church are linked because it is difficult to imagine women being ordained and functioning in ministry without a feminine Christian concept of the divine becoming theologically and pastorally necessary. Fiorenza on the other hand predicts that if women were ordained in the Catholic Church, Jesus' maleness would become insignificant (Hamington, 1995:114).

"The 'women question' facing the Church is not just a question of ordination but it requires an intellectual paradigm shift from an androcentric worldview and theology to a feminist conceptualization of the world, human life and Christian religion" (Fiorenza, 1985a:9).

With this statement Fiorenza makes a very significant contribution to the reality of women's place in the church. Ordaining woman will not necessarily solve the problem of the subordination of women in the church and in society, because that is only a part of the solution. Indeed a new *conceptualization* of the church and society is needed to bring about complete equality. Fiorenza also expresses concern that the ordination of women who are perhaps already members of religious orders and express dependence upon authority in the church may lead to further alienation of women (Hamington, 1995:114).

4.2.4 Fiorenza's Work

According to Fiorenza (1992:198), a critical feminist's reading for transformation attends to three things: first, to the ways in which patriarchal power is encoded in the Bible; secondly, to the consequences of these androcentric inscriptions for women as characters of the Bible, readers or critics; and thirdly, to the implications of unmasking these inscriptions in order to have a feminist reconstruction of the past but also a transformation of the present. To illustrate a critical feminist reading by Fiorenza, her analysis of Luke 13:10-17 from her book "But She Said" will be discussed.

4.2.4.1 She Stood Upright - Luke 13:10-17

Fiorenza (1992:196) indicates that her main goal with the chapter in which she analyzes this narrative, is to demonstrate how a feminist process of interpretation for liberation engages in the critical reading of a particular biblical text. Since this narrative of the healing of a woman is open, it allows readers to elaborate the protagonist of the story in an imaginative and typological way (Fiorenza, 1992:197). According to Fiorenza (1992:199) this story of the woman who was bent double and freed from her infirmity, has become a paradigm for the oppression and liberation, which Christian women experience in biblical religion.

It is pointed out by Fiorenza (1992:198) that the "frame of meaning" determining readings of a text should be paid attention to and she identifies four different "frame of meanings" through which she interprets this text:

- Gender
- Luke's Anti-Jewish Rhetoric
- Political-Rhetorical Struggle
- Liberating Theological Vision

Each of these interpretations done by Fiorenza will briefly be discussed.

• **Frame of Meaning: Gender**

If this narrative is read in an androcentric way that emphasizes the healing power of Jesus as a man, the miracle story re-inscribes female religious dependency and self-alienation and confirms male self-affirmation and importance (Fiorenza, 1992:200). The result of

this is that power and healing is ascribed to the Man Jesus while the woman is the victim. Thus focusing on the maleness of Jesus in the reading of this text increases the woman's self-alienation. Feminist critical readings abandon such a gendered reading and instead shift its attention away from the Man Jesus to the oppression of the women who is repressed and viewed as the 'other' in androcentric texts (Fiorenza, 1992:202).

A critical feminist interpretation for liberation has named the life-destroying power of Western society and religious patriarchy and sees it as a system, which produces ideological gender-dualism although it is not identical to it. This Western patriarchy did not originate in the Bible but it was mediated and perpetuated through Christianity, because of its dominance as a religion in the Western world for almost two thousand years. This patriarchal pattern has defined Christian community throughout the centuries and it was reproduced in society as a whole. Such Christian theology has legitimated racism, colonialism, classism and hetero-sexism in society and church (Fiorenza, 1992:203).

In this story of healing, Jesus focuses on the woman bent double and He insists on her healing. Fiorenza (1992:205) believes that this is what Christian men should do today. They must not only recognize the exploitation and oppression of women, but also relinquish their patriarchal privileges and join women to overcome infirmities imposed by patriarchy. Fiorenza (1992:205) continues by saying that just like the woman bent double did not ask for healing from the Man Jesus but actually came to praise God, so Christian women should realize that liberation will not come from men in the churches. We will only be able to articulate theologically a vision of God's salvation when we recognize the women bent double in our midst. This will result in a community that allows women to become free from patriarchal dehumanization (Fiorenza, 1992:205). Mutuality, according to Fiorenza (1992:206) is only possible when the structural evil of patriarchy and our personal collaboration in it, is rejected. This will only happens in what Fiorenza calls a 'feminist conversion'.

Placing the woman bent double in the center of our attention allows for an anti-patriarchal reading but such a reading is not possible if one does not disrupt Luke's rhetorical contextualization and frame of meaning (Fiorenza, 1992:207).

- **Frame of Meaning: Luke's Anti-Jewish Rhetoric**

The public character of Jesus' ministry is stressed in the form in which Luke represents this miracle story, which results in a controversy dialogue. The leader of the synagogue objects because of his view that the healing of the woman did not have to take place on the Sabbath. Jesus then argued that he had to heal her in order to set her free from her infirmity (Fiorenza, 1992:207). To Fiorenza (1992:208) the point of comparison becomes one that says just as one is permitted to take care of one's animals on the Sabbath, so one can act for the welfare of a daughter of Abraham. Jesus and his offensive action is placed in the center of the controversy and this results in not only the miracle being ascribed to Jesus rather than to God, but it also makes the woman the focus of the struggle (Fiorenza, 1992:208).

Although the woman is the object of male debate, she is no longer the subject of the text. The Lukan text has transformed the story from woman-focused to a male-centered text by merging a Sabbath controversy with a healing story. At first in the healing story the woman had moved from the margin to the center, in the present text she has become the object of men's religious conflict and remained so for centuries (Fiorenza, 1992:208). "Clearly this story calls for a hermeneutics of suspicion" (Fiorenza, 1992:208).

The story of the healing of the bent woman has now become a point of disagreement between Christian and Jewish men over religious matters. A critical feminist theological hermeneutics for transformation must avoid separating the healing story from the Lukan redaction in order to explain away the androcentric tendencies of Luke's version or to judge them as time-conditioned. A hermeneutics of remembrance should rather trace the development of biblical texts and their traditions (Fiorenza, 1992:210). A critical Feminist interpretation for liberation must lay open for theological reflection and critical evaluation both the anti-Jewish and androcentric tendencies of interpretations, and those

of the Lukan text itself, which has generated them. Without losing its focus on women, a critical feminist interpretation for liberation must analyse the narrative as a whole of Luke's Gospel, studying the rhetorical strategies, which inscribe patriarchal structures that privileges powerful men (Fiorenza, 1992:210).

- **Frame of Meaning: Political-Rhetorical Struggle**

Many scholars argue that Luke-Acts addresses Christians of wealth and repute. Hence the Lukan work characterizes women as subordinate members of the Christian community. For apologetic reasons, it is argued, Luke attempts to silence the radical traditions of the Jesus movement that ascribe women, the poor and the outcast a significant role – a view that Fiorenza (1992:211) supports.

The “rhetorical situation” of a text is best detected in its opening and closure and therefore the middle section of the gospel should be read in the light of its beginning and end. According to the preface, Luke 1:1-4, the author intends to write an historical account of Christian beginnings for an elite male audience whose domain is history. An in depth look at Luke's rhetorical strategies shows how the preaching of the “good news” meets resistance and rejection by his own people (Fiorenza, 1992:211). In the narrative tendencies to play down Jewish political hopes in favour of imperial Roman theology can be detected. The text works toward subverting the earthly messianic hopes proclaimed by Jewish women and men and it articulates instead Christian identity as grounded in Luke's depoliticization of the “good news for the poor”. The assertion that the Jewish people and their leaders have rejected Jesus and caused his death is also articulated. It is for this reason that the text must be reconstructed in a feminist critical reading before Luke's Gospel can be reclaimed in terms of a text for liberation (Fiorenza, 1992:212).

According to Fiorenza (1992:212), the rhetoric of the passion narrative underlines Luke's patriarchal tendency to characterize women's discipleship in “feminine” terms. Luke, for instance, does not include in his narrative of Jesus' resurrection his appearance to Mary Magdalene or any other women, but emphasizes that Peter verifies what the women reported. The reason why Luke rhetorically plays down the role of women might serve as

apologetic interest in defending against Jewish and pagan attacks that accuse Christians of basing their faith upon the witness of untrustworthy women (Fiorenza, 1992:213).

Luke never vilifies women and nowhere does he openly argue against them but his subtle politics of significance removes them from apostolic leadership and relegates them to the ranks of community membership (Fiorenza, 1992:213).

- **Frame of Meaning: Liberating Theopolitical vision**

There is, however, also the view that Luke is the “Gospel of Liberation” because it presents Jesus as preaching “good news” to the lowly of society. “A feminist critical interpretation committed to the liberation of women and other oppressed peoples from patriarchal dehumanization must not explain away the patriarchal character of Luke’s rhetoric and perspective by claiming that its anti-Jewish bias, its subtle eclipsing of women’s apostolic leadership, and its elite male interests are due to the author’s use of irony” (Fiorenza, 1992:215). Rather a critical feminist reading must unmask these rhetorical strategies and critically assess their symbolic representations since they immediately re-inscribe and silence the alternative voices, which the text works hard to suppress. A feminist reading can accomplish this by reading Luke’s rhetoric against its ideological grain. Such a reading must critically bring the androcentric strategies of the text into the light and in so doing re-contextualize it, undermining its oppressive dynamics. A re-contextualization that stresses a different theological framework is possible when one reads the story about the woman bent double as a performative sign of the *basileia* (empire/kingdom) of God (Fiorenza, 1992:215).

The two parables that follow the healing story compare the *basileia*, which signifies God’s intended world, to the mustard seed, which is sowed by a man and to the leaven, which a woman mixed into a sizable amount of flour. The parable of the mustard seed stresses the image of the *basileia* initially present as a small beginning of the future. The parable of the leaven demonstrates the *basileia*, which in this case a woman took, and stresses the power of the leaven to affect the whole. In these parables, God is imaged as a poor person working or slave woman baking bread.

The rhetorical unit Luke 13:10-13, 18-21 that connects the *basileia* stories with the story of the bent woman who was healed, stresses that Jesus' ministry seeks the wholeness and well-being of everyone in Israel. The woman that is freed from her bondage indicates the caring presence and power of the Baker-Woman-God at work in the words of the Jesus movement (Fiorenza, 1992:215). The *basileia* does not bring about patriarchal power, but human well-being. It is the mediation of God's future in the midst of the oppressive structures and life-destroying powers of the present. This is available to all God's people as everyone is invited (Fiorenza, 1992:216).

Although the power of God worked through the Jesus movement, we do not know whether the woman that was healed joined this movement. Her story ends abruptly and is lost in historical silence (Fiorenza, 1992:216). Fiorenza (1992:216) concludes her analysis of the story of the woman who was bent down, but who stands up straight now, by saying the following:

“Like so many other women, she remains nameless, faceless, and forgotten. A critical interpretation for transformation therefore needs not just a hermeneutics of suspicion, reconstruction, and critical evaluation but also a hermeneutics of creative imagination, actualization, and ritualization that can give voice to the voiceless, names to the nameless, and remembrance to the forgotten.”

4.2.5 Conclusion

As a critical historian Fiorenza thus emphasizes women in the church or, as she refers to it, the *ekklesia* of women. She makes use of an interpretation in the interest of women and she does this through critical theory, liberation hermeneutics, rhetorical criticism and a women-centered approach. By doing so, she makes women's history visible through historical critical exegesis.

One of her purposes is to get people to see religion from the view and standpoint of women's experience. In order to fulfill her purpose she makes use of a hermeneutics of suspicion, remembrance, proclamation and actualization. In her interpretation of Luke 13:10-17 of the woman that was bent down but freed from her infirmities, Fiorenza's

application of her method is evident. By identifying different frames of meaning, she approaches the text with the broader theological lines in mind in order to make the underlining aspects in the text visible. Fiorenza has much to offer when it comes to liberating women in the church today.

4.3 Tribble and the Literary Approach

4.3.1 Tribble's Life and Background

Phyllis Tribble is an internationally renowned biblical scholar and rhetorical critic from the United States of America. At the time of her retirement she was Professor of Biblical Studies at Wake Forest Divinity School. She began her teaching career as a college lecturer at Wake Forest University in 1963. She taught there until 1971 when she took up a teaching position at Andover Newton Theological School in Massachusetts. She taught here until 1979 when she went to Union Theological Seminary in New York as a professor in Old Testament. From 1981 until her appointment to the Wake Forest Divinity School in 1998, she was the Baldwin Professor of Sacred Literature at Union Theological Seminary. In 1994 she was elected the second female president of the Society of Biblical Literature after Fiorenza. Besides these positions she held, Tribble has been a visiting professor at several other theological schools, including Vancouver School of Theology in British Columbia, Canada, and Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado (Anon., 2006b).

Tribble is considered a leader in the text-based exploration of women and gender in Scripture. In her interview with Sally Cloke (2002) during the National Anglican Conference in Sydney, Australia in July 2002, where Tribble was a speaker, she said the following:

“Some feminists has given up on the Bible because they think it's totally patriarchal, totally andocentric. I'm not among them. But I read the Bible differently from they way it has traditionally been read. I ask questions that have not been asked before, and I take an interest in subjects that have not been dealt with before. For example: what difference does it make to read the Bible from the point of view of its minor characters rather than its major

characters? What happens when you read the Bible in terms of the stories of the losers, rather than the winners?"

This quote indicates Tribble's approach and it is evident that she is part of the Reconstructionist feminists who still hold the biblical text in high regard.

Tribble is the author of the books *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (1978), *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narrative* (1984) and her most recent book, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah* (1994). Furthermore, Tribble has written several articles and book reviews for magazines and scholarly journals (Anon., 2006b).

Closer attention will now be paid to Tribble's approach, views, and works to illustrate how she interprets the Bible so that it can aid in restoring women's place in the church.

4.3.2 Tribble's view on Feminist Theology and Hermeneutics

4.3.2.1 Tribble and Feminist Hermeneutics

Tribble (1993:24) describes the relationship between feminist hermeneutics and biblical studies as follows:

"Born and bred in a land of patriarchy, the Bible abounds in male imagery and language. For centuries interpreters have explored and exploited this male language to articulate theology: to shape the contours and content of the Church, synagogue and academy; and to instruct human beings - male and female - in whom they are, what rules they should play, and how they should behave. So harmonious has seemed this association of Scripture with sexism, of faith with culture, that only a few have even questioned it. Within the past decade, however, challenges have come in the name of feminism, and they refuse to go away. As a critique of culture in light of misogyny, feminism is a prophetic movement, examining the status quo, pronouncing judgement and calling for repentance. In various ways this hermeneutical pursuit interacts with the Bible in its remoteness, complexity, diversity and contemporaneity to yield new understandings of both text and interpreter."

Like some other feminist theologians, Tribble regard the Bible as a basically sound document, which needs to be rescued from false androcentric interpreters (Barton,

1998a:3). According to Jasper (1998:28), Tribble has followed the path of reading creatively; interacting with the texts she studies. She uses close literary readings to expose the processes of power and authority that operates in a text from its origins, in its tradition and in the assumptions of its contemporary readers who are male. Tribble (1978:37) claims that her feminist reading recognizes that, despite the word, authority centers in readers. They accord a document power even as they promote the intentionality of its author. In the interaction of text and reader, the changing of the second component alters the meaning and power of the first.

One of Tribble's aims seems to be the finding of meaning within biblical texts to help regenerate renewed relationships between women and men. She is partial to certain possible meanings and emphases within the Bible, for the sake of today's lived reality and community. She provides the reader with an example of a feminist interpreter who seeks the connections between the text and the context of the interpreter, not as an afterthought as it were, but as integral to the very process of interpretation itself (Loades, 1998:84).

Thiselton (1992:437) finds it worth noting that Tribble also makes use of the hermeneutics of imaginative rapport, which is central to Schleiermacher's hermeneutics and can be linked to the psychological aspects that Schleiermacher has introduced in hermeneutics. She uses this approach extensively and successfully.

When asked in her interview by Cloke (2002) whether feminist theology has influenced mainstream approaches to the Bible as much as she would like, Tribble replied that it depends on which circles you are in:

"In some churches, feminism hasn't made a dent. In others, it's been revolutionary. As a scholarly discipline it certainly has become a major voice in biblical and theological discourse. That it always changes people or changes institutions is much less certain. After all, the concerted efforts of feminists over two or three generations will not overturn 3000 years of andocentrism, either in religious life or in the culture at large. But it can make a difference."

4.3.2.2 Tribble and Rhetorical Hermeneutics

According to Loades (1998:82) feminist interpretation flowered into new life when a text could be treated as a whole literary unit, rather than separate bits. Tribble's approach offered a new tool to engage with a text. It is derived from rhetorical criticism (which was discussed in chapter 2 above). Whereas other feminist interpreters make use of speech-act theory or reader-response criticism to assist their interpretations, Tribble's method is basically at the service of her creative imagination, employed in the hope that the biblical text will yield a usable past (Loades, 1998:83).

In her interview with Cloke (2002), Tribble explains the following concerning rhetorical criticism.

“There is no absolute interpretation, no one meaning of a text for ever and ever. Everybody brings to the text certain perspectives, whether they are aware of them or not. They stand in a certain place. They may be male, they may be female, they may be European, they may be Asian. All of that affects the way we read the text. We don't come with a blank mind.”

Tribble pays attention to the kinds of effects that a biblical passage and its interpretations can produce. She then artfully proposes with considerable passion a reconstructed alternative that seeks to convince the reader of her position. For this reason Clifford (2001:66) describes her work as "rhetorical".

4.3.3 Tribble's Work

4.3.3.1 God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality (1978)

Phyllis Tribble is a Protestant feminist biblical scholar (Clifford, 2001:66) and her most famous work is *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (1978) through which she applied the approach of literary and rhetorical criticism to a number of Old Testament passages. This was one of the earliest pioneering studies of feminist hermeneutics (Thiselton, 1992:436; 452). The Eve story is the result of her analysis of Genesis 2 and 3 and it will be discussed later in this chapter as an example of Tribble's approach.

In *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, the first hermeneutical issue that Tribble identifies is the challenge to find out how biblical texts are re-contextualized within the framework of

a tradition (Thiselton, 1992:431). In her approach, she starts with "the hermeneutics functioning within Scripture" (Trible, 1978:2). After this hermeneutics of tradition is uncovered, it must be supplemented by a hermeneutics of enquiry, which identify the status of a tradition that constitutes a given context of understanding (Thiselton, 1992:431). She makes use of what is referred to by Ostriker (1993:15) as "meticulous textual archeology" and she seeks to divulge an origin beyond the hierarchies of gender difference.

Excursion: Trible's Eve-Story as an example of her Literary, Rhetorical Approach

Trible developed an interpretation of the Eve passage that is found in Genesis 2-3. This interpretation was different from other interpretations in the late 1970s. This interpretation reflects second-wave feminist goals in many respects. Like in second-wave feminism she critiques the unchallenged patriarchal interpretations to affirm feminist goals. Feminist scholars mostly regard this work of Trible as a classic even though some of them are not in full agreement with it (Clifford, 2001:66). When interpreting a biblical passage, Trible views it as a story because according to her "Stories are the style and substance of life. They fashion and fill existence" (Trible 1984:1).

Trible (1978:73) indicates that part of her rhetorical strategy is to stress that feminists must address the Adam and Eve story because the misogynous interpretations of it over the centuries had acquired a status of canonicity and unchallenged respectability. Misogyny is one of the commonly held beliefs regarding the Eve story. It is, however, not the only belief that is derived from what, in Trible's judgment, are thoroughly faulty interpretations of Genesis 2-3. A more in-depth look at what Trible identifies as wrong interpretations (wrong because they have been used to assert male superiority) of this passage will help us grasp her way of handling the text.

Trible (1978:73) postulates that the following beliefs are considered the only truths in this passage:

- A male God creates man first (2:7) and woman last (2:22), what is concluded is that the first means superior and the last inferior or subordinate. Thus men are superior to women in God's scheme of things.
- Woman is created for the sake of man, a helper to cure his loneliness (2:18-23).
- Taken from man (2:23), woman has a derivative and not an autonomous existence.
- Man names woman (2:23) and thus have power over her.
- Woman tempted man and therefore she must be seen as responsible for sin in the world (3:6) and from this one can conclude that she is untrustworthy, gullible, and simple minded.
- Woman is cursed by pain in childbirth for her sin (3:16).
- God gives man the right to rule over woman (3:16).

All the above-mentioned interpretations are inaccurate in Tribble's assessment, and they have been used to assert male superiority and female inferiority as God's will. Revolutionary post-Christian feminists cite these interpretations as reasons for deciding to leave their churches, since it is found among the familiar reasons for the subordination of woman in churches and in society (Clifford, 2001:67).

Tribble makes use of a hermeneutic of suspicion to show that the traditional interpretations of Genesis 2-3 are not the only ones. According to Clifford (2001:67), scholars who use historical-critical methods agree that Gen. 2:4b-3:24 is a very ancient text. It is part of a tradition that possibly can be traced back to the time of King David or King Solomon. Therefore the narrative is at the same time a story of creation and a myth, which responds to questions like why people get married, why women have pain at childbirth, and why serpents do not have legs.

After Tribble has indicated this, she further combines a hermeneutic of suspicion and a hermeneutic of remembrance in her reconstruction of Eve's story. She engages in a literary analysis that is a close reading of this passage by giving careful attention to words and themes. Genesis 2:7 is commonly translated as "and then God formed man of dust from the earth and breathed into his nostrils a breath of life and thus man became a living

being" and Tribble focuses on this particular verse by drawing attention to the Hebrew words that is translated in English Bibles as *man* and *the earth*. Tribble (1978:76-77) is of the opinion that the familiar rendering of the first of these terms as *man* or *Adam* has unnecessarily contributed to patriarchal gender stereotypes of male superiority over females.

Tribble (1978:77) points out that from the Hebrew it is easy to perceive a word play, which makes it seem as if it should be translated as *man* and *Adam*. According to Tribble (1978:77) this is inaccurate and the translation should read the two words as *the creature from the earth* or *the earth creature*. The full translation of Genesis 2:7 should then actually be: *Then God formed the earth creature of dust from the earth ...* (Tribble, 1978:78).

What is of great importance here and must be noted is that the earth creature is neither a particular male person nor a typical human person, but rather a combination of dust and the breath of God. The creature at this stage is alive but not completed and sexually undifferentiated (Tribble, 1978:90). The point that Tribble wants to make is that the creation of the human in Genesis 2 is a multistage process and not an instantaneous accomplishment. The story unfolds and God draws attention to the incompleteness of the earth creature. Ultimately, from this sexually undifferentiated earth creature God creates two, who will be suitable companions for each other (Clifford, 2001:68).

The Hebrew word that is usually translated as *helper* in English can better be translated as *companion* according to Tribble (1978:90) because *helper* can lead to the belief that women were created to help men and are therefore subordinates. Indeed the woman of the story is a helper but it is the same Hebrew word that is used to refer to the God who creates and saves us (Loades, 1998:83). Tribble (1978:91) therefore believes that her translation of the word as *companion* captures the notion that the woman is the true counterpart of the man, corresponding in every way to him as another fully human creature of God (Clifford, 2001:68). The relationship of this couple is thus one of equality and mutuality and not one of female superiority, but certainly not one of female

subordination (Masenya, 2004:35). By saying the following Tribble (1978:98-99) asserts that man does not precede woman in time or rank:

“In the very act of distinguishing female from male, the earth creature describes her as ‘bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh’ (Gen.2:23). These words speak unity, solidarity, mutuality and equality. Accordingly, in this poem the man does not depict himself as either prior or superior to the woman. His sexual identity depends upon her even as hers depends upon him. For both of them sexuality originates in the one flesh of humanity.”

Since it is so relevant specific attention should be paid to Tribble’s interpretation of verse 21-24. She discusses it under the heading “Human Sexuality” (1978:94) and she start off by emphasizing that the earth creature could not find a companion between the animals and therefore God creates human sexuality. She notes that this section or “episode” has a circular design with the word “flesh” as its boundaries. This word appears once in the beginning, once in the end and twice in the middle. It consists of four sections that correspond in form and content. In the first two God is the subject of the active verbs, while the deity does not appear in the last two (Tribble, 1978:94).

Tribble (1978:95) indicates that God made the earth creature from dust, put it in the garden, and gave it responsibility, power and speech. In this episode, however, God returns the creature to a state of inactivity by putting it to a deep sleep. This is an act of progress because it results in a new creation. Not only does it result in a new creation, but God is also seen in the form of new images; an anesthesiologist, surgeon, architect, designer and builder. God builds the rib of the earth creature into a woman. This in itself is significant according to Tribble (1978:95) because all the other creations were made from the earth and dust, but the woman is unique in creation for she is taken from the earth creature.

Previously God brings animals to the earth creature to name them and plants to take care of them, but no purpose is stated in God’s bringing of the women to the earth creature. Specifically God does not give the earth creature power over the woman and she thus does not fit the pattern of dominion as was seen in the previous episodes with the animals and the plants. Such an interpretation is of great significance for this study because

patriarchy believes that man has power over women, but Tribble (1978:97) indicates that this cannot be derived from this passage.

In becoming material for creation the earth creature's character changes. This act has altered the flesh of the creature from one to two. Then after the surgery, this creature identifies himself as male. For the first time the earth creature employs direct discourse, its language being the poetry of Eros, its subject, male and female (Tribble, 1978:97).

“This is now bone of my bones

and flesh of my flesh;

she shall be called *woman*

for she was taken out of man.” Genesis 2:23

Only now the words for *male* and *female* are used and therefore their creation is simultaneous, not sequential. The one is not the opposite of the other but in this act of distinguishing male from female, the earth creature describes her as “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (2:23). This reveals unity, solidarity, mutuality and equality (Tribble, 1978:98). These are the qualities that many people are looking for in the Afrikaans Reformed Churches today. They want those who do not allow for woman to have their rightful place in the church, to realize that God created man and woman equal.

According to Tribble (1978:98), man does not depict himself as prior or superior to woman. His sexual identity depends upon her in the same way as hers depends upon him. For both of them sexuality originates in the one flesh of humanity.

There are only two verbs in the poem of Eros that are found in verse 23, *call* and *take*. The verb *call* appears in the previous episode when the earth creature names the animals and by doing this it establishes power over the animals. This happens because the verb *call* is joined with the noun *name* (Tribble, 1978:99). This naming formula in episode three signifies the power of the earth creature over the animals, but it does not occur in episode

four. When the earth creature calls the new creation woman, the noun *name* is absent and the man does not establish power over her but rather rejoices in their mutuality. Their mutuality and their rejoicing thereof also imply the recognition of their sexuality (Trible, 1978:100).

Trible (1978:101) emphasizes that the words *taken from* does not imply subordination of the woman to the man because it is raw material that was taken from the earth creature in verse 21. It is not yet man from whom the rib is taken and neither is it woman that is taken but only the raw material and this confirms their mutuality. The earth creature is taken from the earth but it is not portrayed as subordinate to the earth but on the contrary, the creature is given power over the earth and is thus superior. It could therefore be said that the woman is superior but with a close reading it becomes clear that this is an inappropriate view seeing that the line says: "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh". Nowhere in this story is subordination a connotation of the phrase *taken from*. For both the man and the woman, life originates with God.

The focus of episode four is on the woman because in her Eros finds fulfillment. Her creation is covered in mystery and her arrival is suspenseful. Since she is an answer to God's promise of a companion, she is the culmination of creation, fulfilling humanity in sexuality (Trible, 1978:103).

"For this reason man will leave his
father and mother and be united to his
wife, and they will become one flesh" Genesis 2:24

In this verse loneliness is overcome by distinction within one flesh. Sexuality is the recognition of oneness and wholeness and not of division. The communion of man and woman is protected from intruders through a third person narration according to Trible (1978:103). The reference to man and woman in terms of parental roles is added in this verse through the words *mother* and *father*. Each couple reveals a unit of equality, the one of creation the other of roles. Although she is called "his woman" she is not his

possession but rather the one in whom he finds fulfillment. She is God's gift of life therefore he must cleave to her. Episode one begins with one flesh and episode four describes the creation of two sexual beings: man and woman. From one comes two and from wholeness differentiation. At the end, however, differentiation returns to wholeness. From two comes the one flesh of communion between male and female. Thus, Eros is consummated (Trible, 1978:104).

Clifford (2001:71) makes it clear how useful this summary of Trible's interpretation of Genesis 2 can be to illustrate how a hermeneutics of suspicion and remembrance can be fruitfully applied to a biblical text in a rhetorical rereading. Trible manages to free Eve's story from the burden of patriarchy and puts before the reader in its stead a reconstructed interpretation with liberating potential.

4.3.3.2 Texts of Terror (1984)

Gorringer (1998:76) argues that there is a need to recognize the link between culture and barbarism as a fundamental aspect of the hermeneutical task, which applies as much to biblical studies as to anything else. He explains it by saying that Trible attempts such a restoration with regard to some of the most terrible texts of the Hebrew Bible. She does this in her book *Texts of Terror: Literary Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (1984).

In this book Trible does not shirk the horrors of some texts such as those concerned with the death of Jephthah's daughter and the unnamed concubine of Judges 19. It further speaks powerfully of slavery and exile, of rape and murder, and of the sacrificial killing of a daughter by her father (Loades, 1998:85) as will be discussed in greater detail. Trible pays close literary attention to these narratives that portray women as victims, some of whom, however, find ways to proclaim their personhood. Through her interpretation of these texts she recovers a neglected history, to remember a past that is embodied in the present and to pray that these terrors will not happen again (Masenya, 2004:37).

With this work Tribble affirms Thiselton's (1992:434) view that the hermeneutical function of biblical interpretation within the feminist movement is "not only to retrieve traditions for positive affirmation but also to make them available as a contributory force for criticism of the present and for transformative action". She does this by recounting the tales of terror in memoriam in order to offer sympathetic readings of abused women (Tribble, 1984:3). It is especially in the character of Hagar that all sorts of rejected women can find their stories. She becomes a symbol of the oppressed because her story "depicts oppression in three familiar forms: nationality, class and sex" (Tribble, 1984:27-28).

To further illustrate Tribble's close reading of a text, an example of her interpretation will also be taken from this work so that her approach to the text can be understood clearly.

Excursion: *The Daughter of Jephthah. An Inhuman Sacrifice. Judges 10:17 – 11:40.*

Tribble analyses the text as a whole but for this study particular attention will be paid to her interpretation of Judges.11:34-39 since this section introduces the female characters in the story. But first a general introduction of what precedes these verses.

Jephthah the Gileadite is appointed as the leader of Israel in their battle against the Ammonites. His mother being a prostitute and his father unknown, he is presented as an outcast that attracts friends from the dregs of society (Tribble, 1984:95). At the start of the scene of the battle it is mentioned that the spirit of Yahweh came upon Jephthah (11:29) but in spite of this, Jephthah lacks courage and at the very center of the battle, he vows to Yahweh: "If you will really give the Ammonites into my hand, then whatsoever comes forth from the doors of my house to meet me upon my return in victory from the Ammonites shall belong to Yahweh; I will offer it as a burnt offering" (11:30). The vow is an act of unfaithfulness since the spirit of Yahweh is already on him. Then Yahweh gave the Ammonites into Jephthah's hand and this demands for the promise sacrifice (Tribble, 1984:97).

With this picture in mind, a closer look at Tribble's interpretation of chapter 11:34-39 can now be given. As is typical of Tribble's work, she starts by indicating that this section has

a symmetrical arrangement that is characterized by its form and content. The unit opens and closes with narrated discourse and it surrounds direct discourse. In each section of the narrated discourse, Jephthah's actions surround descriptions of his daughter. In the same way, the direct discourse consists of two speeches by the father surrounding two speeches by the daughter. The whole design, as well as the content, shows that Jephthah confines his daughter, even unto death (Trible, 1984:98).

Just as Jephthah arrives at his home in Mizpah his daughter and only child "come forth" from his house. The same words are used and it links with the vow immediately. His daughter is thus Jephthah's sacrifice that must die for his unfaithfulness. She comes out to receive her victorious father with "trimbles and dances" which make their meeting even more ironic (Trible, 1984:100).

Trible (1984:101) compares this with God's command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. She notes that this event begins with a divine test of faithfulness contrary to Jephthah's human vow of unfaithfulness. Jephthah is not Abraham; distrust and not faith has singled out his only child. Abraham's son also had a name: Isaac and a respectable family lineage. By contrast, the daughter of Jephthah is nameless and her lineage not worth mentioning.

When he sees her, Jephthah rents his cloths but he mourns for himself and not for his daughter. He stresses the devastating deed of the daughter and emphasizes that she is the cause of the calamity. She is overwhelmed by the blame. Being faithful to an unfaithful vow condemns Jephthah's daughter and at this point father and daughter are split apart in deed and destiny. Though he calls her "my daughter", he offers no release or sympathy. His words are much different from Abraham's, which contained compassion. He assured Isaac, "God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son" (Gen. 22:8). Jephthah offers no comfort (Trible, 1984:102).

The daughter answers her father unaware of the specific content of the vow. She does not show any self-pity, anger or depression. She shows compassion towards her father unlike

he did to her. Jephthah then explains: "I have opened my mouth to Yahweh" to which his daughter confirms in the same words: "You have opened your mouth to Yahweh" (11:36). The narrator reports her second speech when she requests to be let alone for two months to wander upon the hills with her female friends. This time is for lamentation for an unfulfilled life.

The fact that she wants to spend her last days with her female friends introduces a new dimension to the story. Up to now she has only been portrayed in isolation as the only child. But now she wants to be with her own kind and this transcends the distance between father and daughter. The father grants her the request and from here only the narrator speaks (Trible, 1984:104).

The storyteller reports that her plan has been fulfilled and after these two months with her friends she returns home. Then the narrator tells the deed, quickly and without passing blame: "He did to her his vow which he has vowed" (11:39b). This story ends much different from that of Abraham for in his story the angel of the Lord intervenes to save the child. With Jephthah, however, the faithless vow is the subject of the story from the beginning to the end. It controls both father and daughter but in different ways. Under the power of the vow, the daughter has died by a premature, violent death (Trible, 1984:105).

Trible (1984:106) indicates the circularity of this story. "A vow led to victory; victory produced a victim; the victim died by violence; violence has, in turn, fulfilled the vow."

4.3.4 Conclusion

Phyllis Trible is a protestant feminist biblical scholar and rhetorical critic. She is considered a leader in the text-based explanation of women and gender in the Scripture, as was mentioned. She mainly makes use of rhetorical criticism and she does it in a creative way by conducting interactive close readings of texts. She is of opinion that every reader brings to the text certain perspectives and therefore there cannot be one singled-out interpretation of a text.

Trible is committed to the Bible but she reads it differently than it has been read traditionally and she critiques unchallenged patriarchal interpretations to affirm feminist goals. This is evident in the two excursions from her famous works. Tribble has a unique, very effective way, in dealing with the text to uncover hidden truths that can certainly be applied to help improve women's role also in the Afrikaans Reformed churches.

4.4 A Comparison between Fiorenza and Tribble

The discussion above was explanatory of Fiorenza and Tribble's ways of analysing a text. In conclusion their works will briefly be compared to indicate the similarities but more specifically the differences in approach.

The greatest similarity between Fiorenza and Tribble is the fact that they are both Reconstructionist Christian feminist theologians who seek a liberating theological core for women within the Christian tradition, but also work towards a transformation and reconstruction of society. This liberation that they seek is not one-dimensional. It calls for repentance by righting wrongs. The wrong that is of primary concern here is the effects of patriarchy on people's lives (Clifford, 2004:33-34). In order to achieve these stated goals both Fiorenza and Tribble employ a hermeneutics of suspicion, remembrance and reconstruction in their work.

The greatest and most significant difference between Fiorenza and Tribble is their general approaches to the text. Fiorenza makes use of the historical approach, while Tribble uses the literary approach when analysing a text.

Fiorenza shows special interest in what lies behind the text in its historical setting. Her work is an indication that she is of opinion that the reader can deduce things about the original setting of the text from what is presented in the text. She mentions for instance in her analysis of the book Luke that the author emphasizes that the execution of Jesus as the king of the Jews was a failure of the Roman justice under pressure of Jewish leadership. Luke uses this to subvert Jewish political and Roman universalist tendencies and he plays down Jewish political hopes in favour of imperial Roman theology

(Fiorenza, 1992:212). Fiorenza (1992:211) further indicates that the author of Luke intended to write a historical account of Christian beginnings for an elite male audience whose domain is history. Although these statements are not given directly in the texts, Fiorenza is of opinion that it can be deduced from what is given and sometimes not given in the text.

Fiorenza also makes use of form criticism as a tool to reconstruct the social life and institutions of biblical communities and she pays particular attention to the effects of patriarchy at the time. She indicates in the discussion above on the “Frame of Meaning: Gender” that patriarchy originated thousands of years back and that it was mediated through Christianity (Fiorenza, 1992:203). An emphasis is placed on Luke’s rhetorical strategies to reveal the patriarchal structures, which are inscribed in them.

Her interest in the context in which certain ideas are expressed in the Bible, is evident of her use of tradition criticism and she re-constructs the pre-history of text which show her use of redaction criticism. Fiorenza (1992:210) explains in her analysis of the woman who was bent double, that the androcentric tendencies of Luke’s version should not be explained away or seen as time-conditioned but these tendencies as well as the political strategies used in the text should be brought into the light. This can be done through a reconstruction and re-contextualization by reading against the ideological grain (Fiorenza, 1992:212). The assertion that the Jewish people and leaders have rejected Jesus and caused his death is articulated in the Lukan text and should be reconstructed in the same way (Fiorenza, 1992:212).

Trible, however, focuses on the text itself and on the relationships of its various components to one another. The summary of the Eve story served as a good example of how literary form and theological content cannot be separated. Her emphasis on the meaning of the words and terms, as well as her concern with why one term is used and not another, shows that she employs literary criticism in her work. The fact that she emphasizes that the original text refer to “earth creature” rather than “man” at the beginning of the human creation, for instance, is at the core of validating her

interpretation. At several places in her analysis of the story of Jephthah's daughter, Tribble indicates the significance of the repetition of the same phrases. Tribble (1984:103) for example, explains that the word that has *gone forth* from Jephthah's mouth in his vow in Judges 11:36 has become the daughter who has *gone forth* from his house in 11:34. The same Hebrew word is used in the original text and Tribble thus links the two uses of the word.

Special attention has been given to the fact that Tribble strongly relies on rhetorical criticism. In the story of Jephthah's daughter it is evident how she used this method to discover the rhetoric of the text and to give answers to the lacking parts of the passage. She points out that Jephthah made a human vow because of unfaithfulness. This vow can easily persuade the interpreter that Jephthah is devoted to the Lord and therefore he makes such a vow. Then it would be justified that he kept his vow and sacrificed his daughter. Tribble's close reading, however, exposes Jephthah's unfaithfulness and distrust in Yahweh as well as his daughter's premature, violent and undeserved death.

Although Fiorenza and Tribble differ in their approaches, both of them seek the liberation of women in the church and society and by still acknowledging the Bible as Word of God, they achieve this through their unique approaches to the text.

4.5 Summary

It is thus clear that although Fiorenza and Tribble are both classified as Reconstructionist Christian feminist theologians, they fundamentally differ in their approach to the text. Fiorenza has a historical approach while Tribble uses a literary approach. The discussion of each of their works has illustrated how they go about when interpreting a text. It is because of their differences in approach that each of them has been chosen for this study, for in the next chapter the aim will be to evaluate and apply their work (as representatives of the two approaches) to the churches in South Africa with a reformed tradition. The purpose thereof is to improve the role of the women in this church grouping and to determine how Fiorenza and Tribble's work could be applied for this purpose.

5 An Evaluation of and Application to the Modern-day Church

5.1 Introduction

In chapter 3 it was indicated that women increasingly established a better place in society over the decades. This led to many women asking questions regarding their place in the church. In most instances the role of women in the church was improved and restored but in some cases this issue is still unresolved (Pieterse, 2002:703). The previous chapter focused on Fiorenza and Tribble's work that offers new insights on interpretation. This chapter is aimed at evaluating and applying their methods to the modern-day church. First the current situation in the three mainline reformed churches in South Africa is discussed. Thereafter the ways in which Fiorenza and Tribble's approaches to the text can be utilized in these churches will be explored.

5.2 A Brief History and the Current Role of Women in the Church

The topic of the role of women in the church has been researched in South Africa for decades. According to Van Rensburg (2002:720) when the issue became a burning one in the latter quarter of the 20th century both the *N.G. Kerk* (NGK - Dutch Reformed Church) and the *Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk* (NHK) based their assessments of the situation on the belief that gender should not serve as the basis for any form of discrimination among church members. In research done by Van Helden (2002:762) women from both these denominations indicated that they have enough opportunities to participate in the church. They only need to be willing and available. In the *Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika* (GKSA), however, the issue has not yet been resolved. Even though women have been acknowledged as full members of almost all denominations in South Africa, it does not always imply that they get the opportunity to play significant roles in the church. Van Rensburg (2002:720) indicates that although the Bill of Rights included in the Constitution of South Africa (1996) has secured the equality of gender, women are still being discriminated against in society and, of more relevance to this study, in the church. The following subsections take a closer look at this issue.

5.2.1 *Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika (NHK)*

The *Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika* (NHK) must be credited for being the first of the Afrikaans Protestant churches to allow a women's league as well as allowing women to serve in the special offices. In spite of the fact that many male and female church members were still caught up in the traditional paradigm of patriarchy, the NHK managed to improve the role of women in the church over the years. The following steps in the development of the role of women in the NHK should be noted:

- The traditional attitude of the NHK towards women in the special offices can be seen in the 1937 report on the right of women to vote in the church. It is explained that equality between men and women in the church are totally unacceptable (Bergh & Barnard-Weiss, 1999:94).
- In 1940, however, the NHK became the first of the three main Protestant Afrikaans churches to allow a women's league (Bergh & Barnard-Weiss, 1999:91).
- Several factors like the changing position of women in society and the increasing responsibilities that men experienced at their work, led to the allowing of women to vote in the church in 1957 (Bergh & Barnard-Weiss, 1999:99).
- According to Kleynhans (1983:19) the General Church Meeting (Algemene Kerkvergadering) of the NHK allowed women as deacons in full as early as 1973.
- At the following General Church Meeting in 1976 research was done on the possibility of allowing of women as ministers (Kleynhans, 1983:19).
- A report regarding women in the offices of Servant of the Word was presented at the 1979 General Church Meeting after which it was decided that women can serve in the offices as elders and ministers (Kleynhans, 1983:19).
- By 1983 female ministers attended the General Church Meeting because of their offices. There was no theoretical objection against female deacons and elders (Bergh & Barnard-Weiss, 1999:92).
- In 1995 it was decided to accommodate women in terms of inclusive language (Bergh & Barnard-Weiss, 1999:113).
- The NHK also confirmed its willingness to publicly allow equality in 1998 when two female elders were elected to serve on a commission of the General Church Meeting and one female minister was elected as a member of the Curatorium.

According to Bergh and Barnard-Weiss (1999:92-97), the theoretical equality within the NHK did not necessarily result in the increase of women's rights within the church. Although the first female minister started her work in 1981, in a report written during the 75th anniversary of the NHK's Theological Faculty at the University of Pretoria, no prominence is dedicated to this development. If a happening of such importance is not even mentioned, it is possible that other instances where women acted in the church are also not seen as important enough to report. Even during the 1990s sexism was still evident in many churches and several theologians pleaded for renewal so that it could be ended (Bergh and Barnard-Weiss, 1999:97).

The election of the female members on commissions in 1998, however, seemed to have been a natural, spontaneous act and thus a real representation of the attitude of the majority of NHK church members by the end of the twentieth century.

5.2.2. *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK)*

According to Du Pisani (1996:250), the events in the NGK to find a place for women in the special offices reflect a society that wants to be freed from the old practices in a patriarchal system that does not cater for the practical demands and values of a changing environment. The developments that took place in the NGK started in the 1940s. The following dates and events are of significance:

- In 1944 it was decided in the Orange Free State that female deacons could be appointed to serve where the need might occur. It was noted that it was not a fourth office but only a position for woman to serve. In 1952 the term "Diakonesse-Hulpdiens" (assisting deacons) was coined (Kleynhans, 1983:17).
- During the 1960s practical issues led to the reconsideration of women in the offices. A commission was appointed in 1966 to investigate the issue (Du Pisani, 1996:251).

Du Pisani (1996:261) gives an overview of the events and point of views that followed. It is clear that from 1970-1978 the traditional point of view was superior but from 1982 onwards, thus after the decision taken by the NHK, a modern view became stronger:

- In 1970 it was still taken for granted that women were not allowed to become elders or ministers. The possibility of women becoming deacons was researched.
- At the synod meeting of 1974 it was emphasized that women were not allowed as elders or ministers but it was still not grounded on Scripture whether or not they could be deacons. A commission had to do further research.
- In 1978 it was decided that the Bible does not give a final answer to the question of women in the offices. The issue was referred to the Regional synods to be considered. The general synod approved of women serving as assistant deacons (Diakonesse-Hulpdiens).
- At the 1982 synod it was finally decided that women were accepted in the office of deacon (211 votes against 187).
- Women being allowed as deacons were confirmed at the 1986 synod. The decision regarding the offices of elder and minister was postponed until the next synod meeting.
- In 1990 the decision was taken that women could serve in all the special offices including elder and minister (242 votes against 137).

The following statement by Du Pisani (1996:241) is an indication of the development that took place within the NGK:

“The conclusion is reached that a definite shift away from traditional fundamentalism towards a more open and less dogmatic approach has taken place in the NGK ... However, although theoretically women enjoy equal access to the special offices in the NGK, in practice equality does not exist. In governing bodies of the church, women are still hopelessly under-represented.”

Even though Du Pisani focuses attention to the fact that the practice does not show equality, it is of more significance to this study that women received their rightful place in the church on the basis of liberating (not liberal!) hermeneutics. The practice will follow wherever people accept and apply sound hermeneutical principles, which seek to steer clear of fundamentalism on the one hand, and relativism on the other hand.

5.2.3 Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid Afrika (GKSA)

Van Deventer (2005:690-696) gives a summary of the decisions that were taken by the GKSA regarding the role of women in their congregations and he identifies the following events:

- At the 1918 synod the issue of women voting for male office bearers was discussed for the first time. Forty years later (1958) it was decided that on the grounds that the right of women to vote in the church implies their right to be elected in the church offices, this right would not be granted.
- In 1979 a commission was appointed by the synod to study the role and place of women in the church with regard to offices, service and voting.
- In 1982 yet another commission was appointed with the same task as the previous one, since the report presented by the 1979 commission at 1982 synod exhibited a lack of conclusions and recommendations.
- The process was repeated yet again at the 1985 synod. Significantly, the 1982 commission stated in their report with regard to the office of deacon that Scriptural evidence indicated the eligibility of women to be called to this office.
- An extensive report on the place of women in the church was tabled at the 1988 synod and it was decided that since women are full members of the congregation, they might participate in the election of male office bearers.
- In the same report the conclusion was reached that in exceptional circumstances, women could be gifted and called by God to do certain services. The conclusion, however, was deemed by synod not to be based on solid Scriptural grounds and therefore it was not accepted.
- Twice in 1994 and 1997 appeals against the 1988 decision was tabled but in both cases these were unsuccessful. Another commission was formed in 1997 to contact churches abroad regarding their positions on allowing women into the offices.
- This resulted in a discussion of the reasons for the differences regarding the admission of women to the offices found in the Reformed Church in the Netherlands (GKN) and the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in the USA. If it were the result of different and critical views of Scripture, then the unity in the GKSA would have been threatened.

- The 2000 synod concluded that the grounds of previous appeals against the decision not to allow women in the offices were not sufficiently proven. This decision seemed to be the final closure of the case for women in the offices in the GKSA.
- However, another commission was appointed in 2000 to study “what the Bible reveals about the manner in which the Lord used and still uses women in his church”.
- Against all odds the GKSA decided at the 2003 synod to reverse its decision on the issue of women in the offices, when it was decided to allow women to serve in the office of deacon.

Van Deventer (2005:696) focuses his study on this 2003 synod decision. It should be noted, however, that a further change occurred at the 2006 synod when an appeal was carried against the 2003 decision allowing women in the office of deacon and this decision was once again reversed. The role of the modern woman and her responsibilities in society has completely changed. In the GKSA, however, it is almost exactly the same as a century ago. Although some GKSA church councils have tried to involve women, uncertainty on the issue has stopped them from doing so (Van Helden, 2002:763). This uncertainty has been fuelled by the 2006 decision.

5.3 Reasons for the Current Situation

5.3.1 NHK

It was mentioned that although the NHK was first to allow women in the special offices theoretically, they did not immediately manage to apply this in practice. Bergh and Barnard-Weiss (1999:95) identify a patriarchal paradigm as one of the reasons for this. It seems as if the decision to allow women to play a key role in the NHK was not grounded on the Bible only. External factors like urbanization which placed a bigger work load on the church and gave women an opportunity to play a role in church activities as well as lack of willing men to serve on church councils which resulted in a decrease of finances because there were not enough deacons to collect money, played a significant role in allowing women in the special offices (Bergh & Barnard-Weiss, 1999:101-106).

Bergh and Barnard-Weiss (1999:99) indicates that the interpretation of the Bible is directly linked to the frame of reference of the interpreter and his/her views are accepted as part of the message from Scripture. Men as traditional interpreters of Scripture have laid the burden of submission on women. Tradition determined the style of hermeneutics, which in its turn played a major role in the view of the church in terms of women and their place.

This statement supports the view that the decision to allow women in the special offices in the NHK is not only a hermeneutical one, but rather a practical one. Bergh and Barnard-Weiss (1999:106) also notes that it is most likely a negative connotation that resulted in the fact that Feminist Theology was never applied in the conservative NHK. This indicates that changes in hermeneutical approaches will benefit women in the NHK as well.

5.3.2 NGK

Du Pisani (1996:255) explains that at the end of the 1970s, the old generation of traditionalists in the NGK hierarchy was on their way out. A change therefore occurred in the NGK's official view on the position of women in the church. A new generation of more enlightened theologians filled their places. These theologians questioned the traditionalist approach to among others Bible interpretation. They acknowledged the equality of men and women in spite of their differences in gender (Van Rensburg, 1987:122).

Van Deventer (1990:5) indicates that this change was grounded on a new interpretation of biblical texts, which was previously used to justify male superiority. This new interpretation was related to the historical-critical method that has been discussed earlier in this study. This approach opened the eyes to the vast historical differences between an ancient text related to the Greco-roman world and a present-day context.

5.3.3 GKSA

Van Deventer (2005:696) points out that the core problem in the GKSA is a hermeneutical one. The lack of reflection on the hermeneutical process by the GKSA in the 20th century resulted in a narrow approach to the text. The naïve-realistic approach that is still followed in the GKSA limits the interpretation of the text by ignoring the role of the reader. This can imply that regardless of the circumstances, the GKSA has interpreted certain texts in (according to them) the 'right' way; leaving no space for new ideas and approaches. That this "right way" of reading is also flaunted by the influence of the pre-suppositions of the reader is seemingly not considered. Might this be the reason why objections against the decision of the synod were in some cases just viewed as "not founded on good exegesis" (Van Deventer, 2005:692)? Should this be true, more questions will arise like "What makes exegesis good?" or "Which approach is the right one?" These questions are indeed very relevant to this study. Can Fiorenza or Tribble's approach to the text be seen as "founded on good exegesis"?

According to Van Helden (2002:756), change is only possible if the GKSA's attitude is one of willingness to correct the "unscriptural" traditions regarding the role of women in the church. One of the reasons for the current situation in the GKSA that can be concluded from this statement is that the attitude of the men in positions of power in the GKSA is one of unwillingness to change because of the traditional belief that women are subordinated to men.

Vergeer (2002:684-687) emphasizes the following contradictions in terms of the GKSA's use of hermeneutics:

- The report that was tabled at the synod in 1988 said that the New Testament contains no testimonies of women that served as elders or servants of the Word not even in exceptional circumstances (Bylaag, 1988:63). If this view of Scripture is applied consistently, however, other important issues like infant baptism can also not be used since it does not appear in the New Testament.
- The GKSA's view of 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 is that women should recognize their husband's headship over them. They are of opinion that the female

members of the church were not used in the offices since they had to recognize the headship that God gave to men (GKSA, 1988:519). This can easily lead to the misunderstanding that all men are the head of all women. In this decision, the GKSA makes use of principles given for marriage and apply it directly to church offices.

- The one-sided approach leads to inconsistent views. The second part of 1 Timothy 2 clearly indicates that women are limited in their hairstyles, wearing of gold jewellery, pearls and expensive clothing. This, however, is not interpreted in the same rigid way as the first part of 1 Timothy 2. This inconsistency cannot be explained and from the outside it can easily seem as if biblical guidelines are interpreted in such a way that it keeps women from serving in the offices.

In addition to the contradictions that Vergeer lists, Pieterse's (2002:705) point should be noted. She explains that when the question regarding women's offices in the church is discussed, it is often mentioned that women are in offices as believers. If this is true, they argue, then the question should be asked why men are allowed in the special offices when the office of believer is sufficient.

The GKSA, furthermore, does not take the views of other related churches like the GKN and CRC, into consideration in a serious manner and this may result in the impression that only the GKSA knows the "truth". Although the GKSA takes note of the research done by other churches, they do not let them be influenced by it (Vergeer, 2002:666). The members of the GKSA are then confronted by this situation where women are allowed in the offices in the GKN and CRC but not in the GKSA, in spite of the fact that they have the same confession of faith and acknowledge each other as fellow believers (Vergeer, 2002:665).

5.3.4 Hermeneutical Evaluation

In theory the NHK and NGK have overcome the problem regarding the role of women in the church even though there are still some obstacles in the practical implementing of the decisions made to solve this problem. Since women can fulfil their calling and play an active role in these denominations, the rest of this study will focus primarily on the

GKSA because of their need to still give a theoretical solution for the problem of the role of women in the church.

One of the main reasons for the lack of a theoretical solution to the problem concerning the role of women in the GKSA is because developments in hermeneutics (as was indicated) have not been investigated by this denomination. This results in limitations with regard to the newer insights in terms of the 1) historical and 2) literary aspects of texts. The traditional approach to exegesis within the GKSA is (and has always been) a grammatical-historical one (Krüger, 2006:28) as can be seen in Coetzee, De Klerk and Floor's (1980:26) explanation of what Paul meant by 1 Corinthians 14:34 when he commands women to be quiet during services. According to them (Coetzee, De Klerk and Floor) Paul is writing to a specific congregation with the women of that specific group in mind but they emphasize that it must be considered that in that situation where Paul addresses the women in that particular congregation, the Word of God is also directed at women in all congregations for all times. This serves as an example of how the GKSA take the history in the text as norm without taking into consideration the development in the process of text formation. In terms of the historical part of this approach the GKSA thus, in essence, does not take into consideration the important distinction between the "history *in* the text" and the "history *of* the text" (Hayes & Holladay, 1987:45). The first expression refers to what the text narrates about history while the second is concerned with the story of the text itself (Hayes & Holladay, 1987:45).

With regard to the grammatical aspect of the grammatical-historical approach, the GKSA sees it as referring to language. Krüger (2006:28) points out that the term "grammatical" encompasses the confession that the Bible was inspired by God but it also implies that every word carries meaning. Kaiser (1994:33), however, indicates that when Keil originally used this term in 1788, it referred to what we mean by the term *literal*, meaning "simple, plain, direct or ordinary" (Kaiser, 1994:33) and not necessarily grammar as in the sense of language. Furthermore the developments within the literary approach as was elaborated on above has not yet be researched or taken note of by the GKSA.

In conclusion to this hermeneutical evaluation, it can therefore be said that existing interpretation models, as was seen above, did not seriously consider the developments in hermeneutics in general and biblical hermeneutics in specific as was discussed in previous chapters.

5.4 An application of Fiorenza and Tribble's Approaches to the issue of Women in the Church

It was evident from the previous chapter that both Fiorenza and Tribble emphasize the role of the biblical text in their hermeneutical approach but each introduces new insights in dealing with the text. These insights are rooted in the development of general hermeneutics that was discussed in chapter 2. The reason for their approaches to the text is the fact that they questioned the kind of interpretation that led to the subordination of women in Christian believing communities. In the Reformed tradition this kind of questioning should always be present since this tradition, in essence, took root in the questioning of the authoritative interpretation of the Roman Catholic Church. The reformed churches in South Africa will benefit by taking note of these developments and by realising that it can assist them to gain a better understanding of a text in different and changing contexts. Modern men and women in the GKSA should once again evaluate their faithfulness to Scripture in terms of the role of women in the church. According to Van Helden (2002:768), many women in the GKSA feel that they have been deceived for decades. They are of opinion that unbiblical interpretations, translations and traditional views and practices have kept them from the truth. Since the NHK and the NGK have recognized the place of women in the church, the application of Fiorenza and Tribble's work will be focused on the GKSA in specific.

5.4.1 The Historical Approach and Reformed Theology in South Africa

According to Le Roux (1994:198), the future of historical criticism in South Africa is linked to its past because the way in which it was treated in the past will determine its future use. South Africa has missed the challenge of dealing with the results of the *Aufklärung* that introduced the historical-critical method in Europe. This made European

theologians realize the humanness of the Old Testament and it left them with no other option than to work with the critical results and try to find solutions for the problems. South Africa, instead, took another direction because we never experienced the pressure of working with the historical-critical method and its results. Le Roux (1994:199) elaborates that our theological past did not accommodate the historical-critical method and its important results and therefore neither the historical-critical method nor a critical theology has taken root in South Africa.

The historical-critical approach has been referred to in chapter two above but when applied to the South African context it is useful to read a South African scholar on the issue. Spangenberg (1994:156) summarizes the historical-critical paradigm as follows: the Bible is a collection of old Near-Eastern religious writings, which were written by limited people who in their humanness can err. Several of these writings developed over a long period of time and they were often written by more than one author. These writings include the religious insights and religious testimonies of those people and their contemporaries. These people lived during a specific time in history at specific places on earth. To understand the Bible correctly, the reader must possess the necessary knowledge in terms of the history of Israel and other old Near-Eastern nations as well as early Christianity, the cultural setting of those people, their worldview and their religious beliefs and practices. With this in mind, the history of this approach in South Africa can further be discussed.

Le Roux (1994:200) identifies two reasons why historical criticism was neglected; firstly it was the belief of many followers of the structural (text immanent) approach that it was the only valid approach to the Bible. The second was the estrangement of history and exegesis that included the belief that 'history' referred to historical facts often only investigated to see if something really happened. This view of history has caused alienation between history and theology and between history and exegesis (Le Roux, 1993:23-42).

Van Helden (2002:756) adds that the Bible as a text must never be separated from the cultural-historical information that forms part of it. A limited understanding of this information of the biblical times also causes problems when men and women try to apply biblical prescriptions for today. Prescriptions on the wearing of headgear, clothing and circumcision have been viewed by the GKSA as cultural-bound for years, yet the limitations set for women are still viewed as relevant. Vergeer (2002:668) points out, however, that some members and theologians are upset by the change in meaning that is brought about by using information outside the text. In order to change the current situation in terms of the historical-critical approach to the Bible, a historical consciousness must be cultivated and the method rediscovered as a means of giving meaning to life (Le Roux, 1994:202).

Vergeer (2002:667) identifies three different interpretations of historical nature of Scripture:

- Some researchers leave the historical and cultural-historic facts only as a background or décor to the Scriptures. This implies that there is no real interaction between the Bible and the circumstances in which it originated. In this approach the information outside the text is treated as interesting but as lifeless background that does not play a role in the determining of meaning of Scripture.
- Secondly there are those who feel that sociological interpretation methods can be used fruitfully in the GKSA but only when the aim is not to find a hidden meaning behind the text. This is unclear, however, since the reader does not know which meaning is hidden and which is not.
- A third group views a specific Scripture as entangled with the social and political reality of the era in which it originated. Scripture must be understood as the product of a dynamic society of which the author and first readers form a part. The timeless message of Scripture is understood through taking the fact that it is also time-bound into consideration.

In order to make a valid application of the Reformed hermeneutical principle of the time-boundness of the Bible, interpreters should take into consideration as many as possible

socio-historical perspectives to understand the meaning of a specific part of Scripture in its original context (Vergeer, 2002:670). The historical approach to a text will help to discover which guidelines are timeless and which ones are time-bound. Fiorenza's use of the historical approach will now be applied to see to what extent it could make a positive contribution to the debate.

5.4.2 Applying Fiorenza's Approach

Fiorenza has a specific historical approach to the text as was seen in the previous chapter. Her awareness of the way in which the context of both the text and the reader determines the meaning of a text is of great value. It was seen that Fiorenza is of opinion that a text has a specific message within a specific community. The reader is not always aware of the liberating message that texts offer and therefore the prejudice of the reader should be demolished so that the message of liberation can be seen. If the GKSA can comprehend and apply this insight that Fiorenza offers, by interpreting beyond tradition and patriarchy and in so doing encounter the possible liberating message of some texts, it can lead to the liberation of women in the church. In order to apply her approach to the current issue, her hermeneutical objectives as identified by Ng (2002:13), and discussed in chapter 4, will serve as foundation.

- **Critical Theory:** Fiorenza makes use of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School that criticizes and represses that which is experienced as alienation and oppression (Fiorenza, 1975:62). Although few will refer to the treatment of women in the GKSA as "alienation and oppression", it is at the core what it is. Women are alienated from taking their rightful place in the GKSA, thus also serving as leaders. They are especially alienated from participating in decision-making, planning and being deacons, elders and ministers but they sometimes do get the opportunity to perform actions such as preparing for services or welcoming those who attend the church. This alienation, in essence, is a form of oppression. Fiorenza's critical approach to the text can therefore be applied so that it can criticize and repress the alienation and oppression that is experienced in the GKSA.

- Liberation Hermeneutics: Fiorenza employs the ideas of the liberational theologies, which have the insight that theology is always engaged for or against the oppressed (Fiorenza, 1983:6). The theology of the GKSA is certainly used against oppressed women. According to Van Helden (2002:770) the women in the GKSA have an intense, suppressed and mostly unspoken desire to be equipped and acknowledged as doers of the Word. If a liberational hermeneutics is applied, like Fiorenza does, this limitation can be rectified. The GKSA-women themselves recommend that opportunities for participation in the body of Christ by women must be expanded so that liberation in Christ can be experienced in its fullest sense (Van Helden, 2002:770). It is clear that the GKSA women are not hard feminists or troublemakers, hence the years of tolerance. The GKSA woman must, however, take her position in Christ and call on the liberating Word of God to correct the theology that limited her as the oppressed in the past (Van Helden, 2002:768). Both Fiorenza and Tribble serve as examples of women who took their places in the body of Christ and interpreted the Bible as a text of liberation for the oppressed. If only more women in the GKSA will accept the liberation that they have in Christ like Boëseken who wrote an article on the woman in the church and the women in the Bible. She formulated an argument in favour of a place for women in the church as Christ intended.

“Daarom is dit my pleidooi dat die Kerk, ons Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid-Afrika, op Bybelse gronde gebruik sal maak van die gawes van hart, en hoof en hand van alle belydende lidmate, sodat almal saam met die Drie-Enige God, ook in die ampte kan dien in gees en in waarheid.” (Boëseken, 1973:14).

“Therefore it is my plea that the Church, our Reformed Church in South Africa, will make use of the gifts of heart, and head and hand of all confessed members, based on the Bible, so that everyone together with the Trinity can serve in the offices in spirit and in truth.” (Boëseken, 1973:14).

- Rhetorical Criticism: Fiorenza often uses this term to denote the approach of a communication that links knowledge with action and passion (Fiorenza, 1992:46). It should be noted that Fiorenza and Wuellner have the same view when it comes to

rhetorical criticism. Wuellner (1987:448) states that: "Rhetorical criticism of literature takes the exegetes of biblical literature beyond the study of theological or ethical meanings of the text to something more inclusive than semantics and hermeneutics". Wuellner (1987:449) further explains that rhetorical criticism goes beyond language as a reflection of reality but rather focuses on language as a possible instrument of influence. Rhetorical criticism leads away from the traditional message revealing a message of personal, cultural and social values (Wuellner, 1987:461). This form of rhetorical criticism is thus one that emphasizes the persuasive power of a text and it must be differentiated from the form of rhetorical criticism, which Tribble and Muilenburg follow where it is used within a text immanent approach.

The summary of the history of the GKSA's decisions regarding the role of women in the church, illustrate how they struggled to put into action what the commissions, researching this issue, reported. Fiorenza's rhetorical approach can help in this matter. If rhetorical criticism, as defined by Wuellner was employed by the 2000 commission who had to research "what the Bible reveals about the manner in which the Lord used and still uses women in his church" the results would most likely not have been three years of women being deacons, but it would have been convincingly indicated with passion that women can fulfil offices in the church permanently. This interpretation would also have led to action that implies women being appointed in the offices. There is, however, time for the GKSA to still utilise the promise hold by this form of rhetorical criticism to put into action, with passion, what this approach will reveal. Hopefully it will one day help to rectify women's place in the church.

- Woman-centred approach: Fiorenza finds liberation theologies alone not critical enough of patriarchy as a system oppressive to woman (Fiorenza, 1984:8). Thus she insists on putting the liberation of women at the centre of her thinking. This implies that a text is approached from the viewpoint and experience of women. This approach is needed since the Bible at large is more "male-centred". Van Rensburg (2002:721) makes use of other scholars' research to identify problems regarding hermeneutics and the reading of sacred texts. The issues are the following:

- The authors of the books of the Bible seem to be exclusively male but this fact is often ignored.
- The power of language to construct current realities is ignored.
- The relevance of patriarchy is ignored.
- By reading the writings of male authors only, women's history cannot be determined. Research needs to be done on the hidden history of women.
- When using the books of the Bible as normative for present-day societies, the importance of acknowledging and translating the socio-historic contexts of these texts should be stressed.
- Although Van Rensburg has a more general discussion, it should be added that when it comes to the GKSA, all the synod members and thus 'readers' to resolve this issue, are also male.

A women-centred interpretation cannot be done by men alone, since it primarily involves women's experience. The GKSA can enter into a whole new understanding if they apply this approach of Fiorenza. If this approach is utilized by the GKSA, however, they will have to open their doors at the synod meetings for women as well. To have women that feel strong enough to change the status quo on commissions that research the role of women in the church will enable the GKSA to apply this approach effectively and it will certainly result in a whole new revelation of what the Bible offers for women.

The importance of the development of a historical consciousness should be stressed because a method only provides information that must be ordered according to a frame of reference. A historical understanding of reality and the text is thus more important than the historical-critical method. Such an understanding will restore the method to its proper place. We are in need of history because it can help us to give meaning to our lives. We can in fact be involved with the creation of life's meaning and historical interpretation can contribute to this. It is in the search for the truth behind the text that the historical-critical method can play an indispensable role (Le Roux, 1994:201-202). Barton (1998:9) confirms this by pointing out that historical critics are interested in questions about the

biblical text like when and by whom books were written and what was their intended readership.

5.4.3 The Literary Approach and Reformed Theology in South Africa

As early as 1933, Du Plessis (1933:523) posed the question whether or not the view of the GKSA on the role of women is in accordance with Scripture or whether it is only an old human tradition. When Scripture is approached in a way like Tribble approaches it, it will be discovered whether or not the view of the GKSA is in accordance with Scripture or only in accordance with tradition. It seems, however, as if her approach is not utilized to its full potential by South African Reformed theologians yet.

A 'new' approach developed amongst South African theologians thirty years ago. This movement among New Testament scholars led to a new way of understanding the Bible and terms like "structural analysis" and "immanent exegesis" were coined to describe it. This had far-reaching consequences for the understanding of the Old Testament but this structural analysis led to an under valuation of historical criticism (Le Roux, 1994:200).

In March 1971 some members of the New Testament Society of South Africa had a meeting of great importance. This meeting had a far-reaching effect on the history of the New Testament Society. At the meeting Vorster read a paper in which he urged the New Testament scholars to realize the results of modern linguistics. Vorster based his views on those of Louw who had already explored the possibilities of the newer linguistics. The lecture by Vorster brought about the beginning of a whole movement. His paper emphasized a specific approach and terminology that would guide the future developments of biblical science in South Africa (Le Roux, 1993:28).

The approach on which Vorster's focus fell was a literary approach with a concentration on the final text and the rejection of information about the historical growth of the text. The terminology that he introduced was terms such as *diachrony* (referring to the historical approach), *synchrony* and *structural analysis*. As Le Roux (1993:28) puts it:

“Something really new was introduced, which set New Testament scholars in motion and resulted in a new approach that subsequently received the status of a ‘normal science’”.

5.4.4 Applying Tribble’s Approach

Pieterse (2002:712) notes that one of the core questions in the debate on the role of women in the GKSA is: Are men and women equal in their being before God? The answer to this question, according to them, largely determines people’s interpretation of the relevant Scriptures regarding women in the special offices. This view seems extremely logical and it further implies that Tribble’s approach to hermeneutics offers a possible solution to the problem in the GKSA.

Tribble’s interpretation of Genesis 2-3, the “Eve-story”, which was discussed in the previous chapter, answers this question. It convincingly shows that men and women are indeed equal in being before God. Although this has been indicated very clearly in the discussion of Tribble’s interpretation of this part of Scripture in chapter 4, some of the conclusions that Tribble reaches will be repeated so that it is evident how the GKSA can benefit by applying such an approach to the Bible.

- In using Tribble’s (1978:98-99) own words it will become clear how she grounds in Scripture the notion that men are not superior to women as was believed for centuries. This belief also resulted in the GKSA’s interpretation of Scripture in a male-orientated way and their view of women in the church.

“In the very act of distinguishing female from male, the earth creature describes her as 'bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh' (Gen.2: 23). These words speak unity, solidarity, mutuality and equality. Accordingly, in this poem the man does not depict himself as either prior or superior to the woman. His sexual identity depends upon her even as hers depends upon him. For both of them sexuality originates in the one flesh of humanity.”

- When Tribble refers to *unity, solidarity, mutuality and equality* it certainly refers to man and women as a whole in their being. The implication is therefore that they are equal in all aspects of life, including church life. This further implies that women and

men can fulfil any office in the church, be it deacon, elder, minister or Sunday school teacher.

- Tribble (1978:101) postulates that nowhere in the story is subordination a connotation of the phrase *taken from* that is used in 2:21. For both the man and the woman, life originates with God. This confirms what was said under the previous point: men and women are in essence equal before God.
- Tribble (1978:98) indicates that the distinction between male and female is mentioned in 2:23 for the first time. Their creation is thus simultaneous and not sequential. It can therefore not be said that men are superior in the GKSA because the man was created before the woman.
- Tribble (1978:97) furthermore explains that it cannot be derived from Genesis 2-3 that men are superior to women or have power over them since no purpose is stated in God's bringing of the women to the earth creature. Before that God brought animals to the earth creature to name them and plants to take care of them but God specifically did not give the earth creature power over the woman and she thus does not fit the pattern of dominion as was seen in the previous episodes with the animals and the plants.

If this interpretation is applied in the GKSA so that men have no God given power over women and men are not superior to them, then commissions will not be needed to research endlessly the role of women in the church with no result. This text immanent approach can also be applied to interpret the "problem texts" like 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 to liberate women from the belief that they are subordinated. Should this approach to the text be implemented, women will not only fill the special offices in the GKSA but they will also be present in synod meetings making decisions that benefits the church as a unity in Christ rather than just men having to decide what women can and cannot do in the church.

5.5 Summary

In this chapter, the attitude of the Reformed churches towards both the historical and literary approaches to the Bible was discussed. In general the Afrikaans churches with a reformed tradition seem to reject the historical methods and approaches (as utilized by Fiorenza). They also have limited insight into the newer developments that interpret the text from a text-centred approach (as used by Tribble). This implies that they are, because of ignorance and rejection of new methods, stuck in their old approaches to the text. The rigid approach within the science of Bible interpretation resulted in women having a passive role in the church. Although the NGK and NHK have developed in their view of women, the GKSA still does not allow women in the specific offices.

Tribble's literary approach to the text reveals that men and women are equal while Fiorenza's historical approach offers an interpretation from the experience of women. If the GKSA makes use of these approaches it can result in equality and liberty for women, as already earned for them by their Lord, Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:26-28).

6 Conclusion

Over the years many significant developments took place in the field of general hermeneutics and more specific in biblical hermeneutics. A look at these developments revealed that the three major approaches that originated were the historical-, literary-, and so-called “interested” approaches. A feminist interpretation of the Bible is one of the interested approaches that exist. With the development of feminism in general, this approach started within theological circles because of women’s growing desire to be liberated from the limitations that patriarchy placed on them in society and also in the church. The discussion of the work of two feminist theologians namely Fiorenza and Tribble gave a background for understanding the aim of feminist hermeneutics. These two theologians are representative of two of the major approaches as was mentioned above. Fiorenza follows an historical approach while Tribble makes use of a literary approach.

The patriarchy that was referred to above also left its mark in the Afrikaans churches with a Reformed tradition in South Africa. As recent as three decades ago women still played a passive role in the NHK, NGK and the GKSA, not being allowed to act in the specific offices. Fortunately, the NHK and NGK has reconsidered their views and decided to allow women to fulfil their calling and play an active role in the church. The GKSA, however, confirmed their belief at the 2006 synod meeting that women are not supposed to serve in the special offices.

It was seen that the dispute regarding women in the church, in essence, is rooted in conflicting interpretations of the Bible. The discussion of the attitude of the GKSA towards both the historical and literary approaches to the Bible, showed that they not only reject the historical methods and approaches but they also have a limited understanding of the newer developments as regards the literary approach. The result of their ignorance and rejection of these methods and developments left the GKSA limited to the grammatical-historical approach to the text, which they still follow. It is this approach that can partially be blamed for the current role of women in the church, which prohibits them from serving in the special offices.

Van Deventer (1998:84) refers to Gadamer's metaphor in which he states that interpretation can be explained as a conversation between the interpreter and the text that is being interpreted. It is emphasized that both parties who conduct the conversation are equal. It is crucially important that it is an open conversation where the interpreter's own opinion is questioned with the realization that the process of interpretation is bigger than the participants (Van Deventer, 1998:84-85). It is thus unethical for one party to handle his/her presuppositions as superior so that the outcome is manipulated. The result is that the conversation is ended by a subjective approach. Once the conversation ends, interpretation also stops (Van Deventer, 1998:85). The above exploration of the current debate within the GKSA reflects its presupposition namely that women are subordinated to men, as superior to what the text says. Whether this happens consciously or unconsciously, it results in women not fulfilling their role (and calling) in the church.

Van Deventer (1998:95) suggests that the science of Bible interpretation must replace its limited approaches and methods to the text. The researcher, in this case the GKSA, should critically evaluate his/her own traditions. These traditions must be reconstructed within the ever-changing contexts so that new traditions can be formed.

This study attempted to suggest that a critical evaluation of the approach to the text done by the GKSA in terms of the place of women in the church, could lead to the liberation of women. Tribble's approach that includes a hermeneutics of suspicion and remembrance can be applied to reveal the fact that men and women are equal before God as was seen in the discussion of her Eve-story, and that they should therefore also be equal in the church. Fiorenza's approach will allow women to interpret the Scriptures from their experience and in a critical way, taking into consideration the role that the context of both the text and the reader plays. Should the GKSA allow women to contribute to their interpretation, a whole new dimension will be added to their views. A critical, rhetorical approach to the Bible can bring liberation for women in the GKSA. This is the essence of Fiorenza's approach.

It is therefore undoubtedly true that both Fiorenza and Tribble's 'different' approaches to the text can help the GKSA to restore their female members' place in the church. The question, however, is whether or not the GKSA is willing to apply these approaches. If they are so caught up in their way of interpreting a text through the grammatical-historical approach, with no concern for the developments within hermeneutics or the changing contexts when Scripture is interpreted, the future looks gloomy for women in the GKSA.

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