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FEMINIST HERMENEUTICS AND PENTECOSTAL SPIRITUALITY: THE CREATION NARRATIVE OF GENESIS AS A PARADIGM[1]

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1. Preliminary Remarks

It is a great privilege to have been asked to read a paper at this fourth annual meeting of the Asian Pentecostal Society. Gone are the days when women were confined to the kitchen and assigned to perform domestic chores. Also gone are the times when only men were trained for the ministry of the church. This changing scenario necessitates the reconsideration of the role of women in church and ministry. One of the biggest and most controversial questions in the interpretation of the Old Testament concerns the question of the position of women in the church and society. Therefore, women began to question their role and function in church and society assigned to them by men. The result has been a re-examination of many biblical passages and a dynamic process of interpreting the scriptures from a feminist perspective, which has questioned and challenged many of the traditional male interpretations of the text.

The present influx of feminist materials itself shows how this topic has become important in biblical scholarship. For instance, in 1992, *The Women's Bible Commentary* was published by 41 American feminist scholars, almost all of whom are on the faculties of prominent universities and hold doctoral degrees in biblical and related fields. However, the *magnum opus, The Feminist Companion to the Bible* (Sheffield Academic Press, UK, 1993-97), a ten-volume work provides a work of an international flavor. A second series to the *Feminist*

[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Fourth Annual Meeting of Asian Pentecostal Society at the Ecumenical Resource Center, United Theological College, Bangalore, India, August 2002.

Companion to the Bible are already on print (1998-). J. W. Rogerson one of the prominent Old Testament scholars rightly points out that "the future existence of Old Testament study depends upon how it reacts to the questions that are being put to it by liberation hermeneutics and the enterprise culture."[2] In the same vein David Clines also shows that feminist criticism holds "great promise (or challenge) for biblical interpretation, as well as also for the other theological disciplines."[3] Therefore, in this paper I examine how feminist hermeneutics pose a challenge to Pentecostal spirituality.

2. Feminist Hermeneutics of the Bible

The proliferation of methods in biblical interpretation has become a notable trend in contemporary biblical scholarship. These trends have produced a climate that has been favorable to modern feminist readings of the Bible. For many feminist interpreters, the Bible the cornerstone of Judeo-Christian faith was born and bred in an androcentric and patriarchal culture. As a result they believe that the Bible has been used in the past and the present to legitimate subordinate roles of women in church and society. The feminist readings challenge traditional readings, finding male bias in much previous scholarship. Feminist readers ask how far the patriarchal texts (Bible) can be authoritative and normative in articulating the theology and practices of the church. So feminists are involved in offering alternative readings, either a non-sexist, egalitarian reading with an aim to depatriarchalize the text, or a "resistance reading," that is, one which reads "against the grain" of the text. Hence feminist readings challenge the authority, canonicity, veracity and the normativity of the biblical texts because of their perceived patriarchal- androcentric orientation. Although feminists have evolved polyvalent approaches to reading the Bible feministically, the feminist debate is mainly centered on the emotive issue whether the biblical text is irredeemably patriarchal or unequivocally egalitarian. These two contrary views dominate

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[2] J. W. Rogerson, "What Does it Mean to be Human? The Central Question of Old Testament Theology?" in *The Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield*, JSOTS 87, eds. David J. A. Clines *et.al* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), pp. 285-98 (298).

[3] D. J. A. Clines, "Possibilities and Priorities of Biblical Interpretation in an International Perspective," *Biblical Interpretation* 1 (1993), pp. 67-87 (83).

contemporary feminist biblical scholarship. However, in the feminist interpretation of the text, the creation narrative in Genesis 1-3 has become the *locus classicus.*

3. Feminist Hermeneutical Methods

Although feminists utilize various hermeneutical methods, their individual hermeneutical strategies differ from one another. Their overall method is essentially that an individual's theological perspective on the biblical traditions determines his or her hermeneutical approach to the text. Some, for instance, presuppose that the Bible is permeated with patriarchy and therefore develop a rejectionist stance. On the other hand, some still believe that the Bible itself can offer a critique of patriarchal domination and hence develop a revisionary approach.

Since I think Carolyn Osiek's categorization of feminist hermeneutical alternatives is simplistic and inadequate to explain the complex nature of feminist hermeneutics,[4] I will follow some of the present hermeneutical categories as used in the *Postmodern Bible* to bring all the feminist hermeneutical approaches together. Before turning to them, however, it is interesting to note that Jonathan Culler provides still another useful categorization of feminist criticism.[5] He classifies the feminist reading process into three *levels* or *moments*. In the first level, the criticism is focused on the concern of the woman character and her experiences. The second level of feminist criticism aims "to make readers—men and women—question the liberating and political assumptions on which their reading has been based."[6] In the third level women readers explore alternative readings. By and large these levels can align with our three categories.

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[4] She classifies feminist hermeneutical approaches under five categories as rejectionist, loyalist, revisionist, sublimationist and liberationist. See Carolyn Osiek, "The Feminist and the Bible: Hermeneutical Alternatives," in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, ed. A. Y. Collins (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), pp. 94-105 (97-105). For a recent different classification, see E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon, 1992), pp. 20–50.

[5] J. Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), pp. 43–64.

[6] Culler, *On Deconstruction*, p. 51.

3.1 Hermeneutics of Recuperation

The Postmodern Bible says of this position: "[T]he hermeneutics of recuperation remains thoroughly invested in the economy of truth and offers no critique of the philosophical grounds of the Bible's truth claims."[7] In this approach, feminist interpreters aim to recover the biblical texts from patriarchal mistranslations and misinterpretations. Through their rereading they attempt to "reclaim" the texts positive to women. Trible, for instance, finds the "depatriarchalizing principle" at work in the scripture itself against the patriarchal culture. She writes: "I affirm that the intentionality of biblical faith, as distinguished from a general description of biblical religion, is neither to create nor to perpetuate patriarchy but rather to function as salvation for both women and men."[8] She has adapted the method of rereading to depatriarchalizing the text. So Trible and others, such as Phyllis Bird, Joy Elasky Fleming, Mary Phil Korsak, Helen Schüngel–Straumann, Luise Schottroff, Mary Evans,[9] Mary Hayter, and Grace Emmerson, have attempted to reread the famous texts used against women (Gen 1–3).

As part of the recuperative strategy, Trible and some other feminists try to employ a hermeneutics of retrieval by which they want to bring into focus women role models from the Old Testament. J. Cheryl Exum was Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at Boston College. At present she lectures in the Department of Biblical Studies at Sheffield University. She has adapted literary critical analysis in her feminist exegesis and has done a great deal of research on literary approaches to the Bible. Recognizing the prevailing patriarchal nature of the scripture, she brings out counter pictures through the process of close reading (e.g., the women of Exodus, Ruth, Esther and Judith). So, recognizing the prevailing patriarchal nature of the scripture, Exum provides "positive portrayals of women."[10] She writes: "Within the admittedly patriarchal

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[7] *Postmodern Bible*, p. 246.

[8] Phyllis Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 41 (1973), pp. 30-48 (31).

[9] M. Evans, *Women in the Bible* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1983).

[10] See J. Cheryl Exum, "You Shall Let Every Daughter Live: A Study of Exodus 1:8-2:10," in *The Bible and Feminist Hermeneutics*, ed. M. A. Tolbert (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), pp. 63-82; Exum, "'Mother in Israel': A Familiar Figure Reconsidered," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. L. M. Russel (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), pp. 73-85, cf. P. Trible, "Bringing Miriam out of the Shadows," *Bible Review* 5 (1989), pp. 14-25, 34.

context of the biblical literature, we find strong countercurrents of affirmation of women: stories that show women's courage, strength, faith, ingenuity, talents, dignity and worth."[11] Trible aims to unearth the gynomorphic images to depict God in the Bible as a recuperative strategy. Phyllis A. Bird has also read many biblical texts from a feminist perspective. Though her perspective is feminist, her methodology is traditional historical criticism. In her works she attempts to recover the "hidden history of women." She has contributed many articles in the area of women's status in early Israel and their position in the Israelite cult.[12] Furthermore, Trible has also attempted to "recover a neglected history" of abused women, recounting their "tales of terror *in memoriam*,"[13] thereby offering a hermeneutics of remembrance.

3.2 Hermeneutics of Suspicion

If the hermeneutics of recuperation is text–affirming, the hermeneutics of suspicion "does not presuppose the feminist authority and truth of the Bible, but takes as its starting point the assumption that biblical texts and their interpretations are androcentric and serve patriarchal functions."[14] However, Schüssler Fiorenza does not want to reject the Bible as a whole, since she thinks a "dualistic hermeneutical strategy" can be developed from the Bible. In other words, she locates two contradictory facts concerning women in the Bible. That is, on the

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[11] J. C. Exum, "The Mothers of Israel: The Patriarchal Narratives from a Feminist Perspective," *Bible Review* 2 (1986), pp. 60-67 (60).

[12] See Phyllis A. Bird, "Images of Women in the Old Testament," in *The Bible and Liberation*, ed. Norman K. Gottwald (New York: Orbis, 1983), pp. 252-306; P. A. Bird, "'Male and Female He Created Them': Gen. 1:27b in the Context of the Priestly Account of Creation," *Harvard Theological R*eview 74 (1981), pp. 129-59; P. A. Bird, "'To Play the Harlot': An Inquiry into an Old Testament Metaphor," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy L. Day (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), pp. 75-94; P. A. Bird, "The Place of Women in Israelite Cultus," in *Ancient Israelite Religion*, eds. Patrick D. Miller, Jr. et al. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), pp. 397-419.

[13] P. Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary—Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (London: SCM, 1992, first published by Fortress in 1984); cf. J. C. Exum, "Murder They Wrote: Ideology and the Manipulation of Female Presence in Biblical Narrative," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 43 (1989), pp. 19-39.

[14] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon, 1984), p. 15; cf. Culler, *On Deconstruction*, p. 51.

one hand, the Bible has promoted patriarchal and androcentric values. On the other hand, "the Bible has also served to inspire and authorize women and other nonpersons in their struggles against patriarchal oppression."[15]

Carol Meyers questions the Bible's authority: "Like most scholars, I do not believe the texts are the direct word of God.... I believe it is a record of the religious beliefs developed by a society struggling to understand God and the world."[16] Yet she reads the text more positively.[17] In a similar vein, Alice Laffey writes: "Since the biblical texts are historically conditioned and were produced by patriarchal society, they are patriarchal in character. They must, therefore, be approached with suspicion."[18] However, she finds that the Bible has liberation potential towards freedom and equality. Recognizing the texts' patriarchal orientation, both Meyers and Laffey offer an egalitarian reading of the creation accounts using their social–scientific and literary methods respectively. Meyers looks behind the text and unearths the social world to locate the biblical woman. Laffey, however, finds a

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[15] E. Schüssler Fiorenza, "Transforming the Legacy of The Woman's Bible," in *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Introduction*, vol. 1, ed. Schüssler Fiorenza (London: SCM, 1994), pp. 1-24 (5).

[16] William Sasser, "All about Eve," *Duke Magazine*, Sept-Oct 1994, pp. 2-7 (3).

[17] See Meyers, "'To Her Mother's House': Considering a Counterpart to the Israelite *Bêt 'ab*," in *The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis* (Norman K. Gottwald Festschrift), eds. D. Jobling et al. (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim, 1991), pp. 39-51; "Of Drums and Damsels: Women's Performance in Ancient Israel," *Biblical Archaeology* 54 (1991), pp. 16-27; "Gender Imagery in the Song of Songs," *Hebrew Annual Review* 10 (1986), pp. 209-23; "Returning Home: Ruth 1:8 and the Gendering of the Book of Ruth," in *A Feminist Companion to Ruth,* pp. 85-114; "The Hannah Narrative in Feminist Perspective," in *A Feminist Companion to Samuel and Kings*, pp. 93-104; "Everyday Life: Women in the Period of the Hebrew Bible," in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, eds. C. A. Newsome et al. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox; London: SPCK, 1992), pp. 244-51; "The Creation of Patriarchy in the West: A Consideration of Judeo-Christian Tradition," in *Foundations of Gender Inequality*, ed. A. Zagarell (Kalamazoo: New Issues Press, 1994), pp. 1-36; "Women and the Domestic Economy of Early Israel," in *Women's Earliest Records: From Ancient Egypt and Western Asia*, ed. B. S. Lesko, Brown Judaic Studies 166 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), pp. 265-81.

[18] Alice Laffey, *Wives, Harlots and Concubines: The Old Testament in Feminist Perspective* (London: SPCK, 1990), p. 2. Originally, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988).

liberation perspective against patriarchy operating within the scripture itself.[19]

3.3 Hermeneutics of Resistance

The third approach is an ideological reading, "a deliberate effort to read against the grain—of texts, of disciplinary norms, of traditions, of cultures."[20] In other words, "[r]esistance readings demonstrate the fundamental openness of texts and how meaning cannot be determined absolutely (that is, meaning cannot be decontexualized) but is itself resistant to ultimate or final interpretation."[21] In the context of feminist criticism Judith Fetterly writes: "The first act of a feminist critic is to become a resisting rather than an assenting reader and, by this refusal to assent, to begin the process of exorcising the male mind that has been implanted in us."[22] Many, perhaps most postmodern feminist readings may be categorized as a hermeneutics of resistance. In this reading strategy, feminists apply various hermeneutical methods such as structuralism, literary criticism, semiotics, narratology, intertextuality, psycho–analytic criticism, reader–response criticism, deconstruction and even in some cases certain eclectic methods combining two or more methods together.

The feminist readings of Mieke Bal, Ilana Pardes, Ilona Rashkow, Danna Nolan Fewell, Pamela J. Milne, Athalya Brenner all project to some degree or other a kind of resistant reading. All these feminists analyze the Hebrew Bible as a thoroughly patriarchal construct, and developing a strategy of response and resistance, and in some cases counter–reading. J. C. Exum argues: "a feminist critique must, of necessity, read against the grain."[23] Like Bal, she approaches the text as a "cultural artifact," not as a religious object. Therefore, her "intention in this book is neither to recover affirmations of women in the Bible nor to

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[19] Laffey, *Wives, Harlots and Concubines.*

[20] *Postmodern Bible*, p. 275.

[21] *Postmodern Bible*, p. 302.

[22] J. Fetterly, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction (*Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), p. xxii, as cited by Culler, *On Deconstruction*, p. 53.

[23] J. C. Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives*, JSOTS 163 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), p. 11.

attack the Bible as a sexist document."[24] Instead, she attempts to "construct feminist (sub)versions of biblical narratives." Moreover, most of the feminists for instance consider "interpretation to be a *reader's response,* necessarily based on the *reader's* personal input, assumptions, and biases."[25]

Danna Nolan Fewell, Associate Professor of Old Testament at Perkins School of Theology, Texas, has a keen interest in reading Old Testament narrative texts in literary perspective. Throughout her work one can observe the ideological dimension of narratological interpretation. She has written most of her writings with David M. Gunn in the feminist area.[26]

Athalya Brenner writes at length as a Jewish woman both in Hebrew and in English. She examines the social roles of Israelite women by a literary narrative approach. Her study reveals the various roles taken by women in the Old Testament period. She concludes that women always had a secondary status in Israelite society.[27]

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[24] Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 9.

[25] I. Rashkow, *The Phallacy of Genesis: A Feminist–Psychoanalytic Approach* (*L*ouisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), p. 110; emphasis original.

[26] Danna Nolan Fewell, "Feminist Criticism of the Hebrew Bible: Affirmation, Resistance, and Transformation," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 39 (1987), pp. 39-65; D. N. Fewell and David M. Gunn, "Controlling Perspectives: Women, Men, and the Authority of Violence in Judges 4 and 5," *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 56 (1990), pp. 389-411; D. N. Fewell and D. M. Gunn, "Tipping the Balance: Sternberg's Reader and the Rape of Dinah," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110 (1991), pp. 193-211; D. N. Fewell and D.M. Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993); D. N. Fewell, "Reading the Bible Ideologically: Feminist Criticism," in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Interpretations and Their Applications*, eds. S. L. Mckenzie et al. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), pp. 237-251; D. N. Fewell and D. M. Gunn, "Genesis 2-3: Women, Men and God," in *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 194-205.

[27] See Athalya Brenner, *The Israelite Woman* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985). See also A. Brenner, "Who's Afraid of Feminist Criticism? Who's Afraid of Biblical Humour? The Case of the Obtuse Foreign Ruler in the Hebrew Bible," *JSOT* 63 (1994), pp. 38-55.

4. Feminist Hermeneutics and Pentecostal Spirituality

One may recall Tertullian's famous question "what does Athens to do with Jerusalem?", when we discuss 'Pentecostal Spirituality'. How does feminist hermeneutics affect Pentecostal spirituality? Before we proceed, we need to have some understanding about the concept 'spirituality', especially the Pentecostal spirituality.

The term "spirituality" has a wide range of meanings in all religions. However, the term "spirituality" does not occur generally in biblical or theological dictionaries. Broadly speaking, one's spirituality has something to do with God. M. D. Macchia defines spirituality as "our way of relating to both God and the world".[28] He has a healthy approach to spirituality as he brings together both vertical and horizontal shades of spirituality. What is Pentecostal spirituality? Is that different from Christian spirituality? I would say, Pentecostal spirituality shares many traits of Christian spirituality as Pentecostalism is thoroughly rooted in the historic faith. However, Pentecostal spirituality is distinct as it is the spirituality of the Spirit of God. In other words, the Spirit of God is believed to be operational in every sphere of their spirituality. According to one recent definition, Pentecostal spirituality is "a particular configuration of beliefs, practices and sensibilities that put the believer in an *on-going relationship to the spirit of God.*"[29] According to R. P. Spittler, a renowned Pentecostal Theologian, Pentecostal spirituality consists of five "implicit values." They are: individual experience, orality, spontaneity, otherworldliness and commitment to biblical authority.[30] I will not attempt to deal with every area of Pentecostal

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[28] See F. D. Macchia, *Spirituality and Social Liberation: The Message of the Blumhardts in the Light of Wuerttemberg Pietism with Implications for Pentecostal Theology* (Dublin, IN: Prinit Press, 1990), p. 4. R. P. Spittler, "Spirituality, Pentecostal and Charismatic," *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, eds. S. Burgess et al (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), pp. 804-805 defines spirituality as "a cluster of acts and sentiments that are informed by the beliefs and values that characterize a specific religious community."

[29] Daniel E. Albrecht, *Rites in the Spirit: A Ritual Approach to Pentecostal/Charismatic Spirituality,* JPTS 17 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), p. 218. Emphasis mine.

[30] Spittler, "Spirituality, Pentecostal and Charismatic," p. 806: For Pentecostals "the Scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments are verbally inspired of God and are the revelation of God to man, the infallible authoritative rule of faith and conduct (2 Tim 3:15-17; I Thess 2:13; 2 Pet 1:21)." In the same vein, D. E.

spirituality from feminist hermeneutics. However, the Bible as the word of God and its authority has been challenged again and again by feminist interpreters of the Bible. As a Pentecostal academic, I strongly believe that our whole-hearted commitment to the word of God and the present appropriation and actualization of its message through the illumination of the Holy Spirit makes us distinct from other segments of the Christian community[31]. Therefore, we should not seek after scholastic credibility or academic respectability at the expense of our commitment to the word of God and our understanding of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. However, in modern feminist hermeneutics, the foundational value of Pentecostal spirituality (i.e., the Bible and its authority) is at stake.

I will start with a couple of caveats. Although I am sympathetic to many of the feminist concerns, as a Pentecostal academic, I am committed to defending the important aspects of our spirituality noted above. Hence, I will respond to the feminist challenges critically as a Pentecostal scholar. Contrary to many feminist readings, I would argue that the text does not address the question of egalitarianism or androcentrism, even though the context in which the text emerged is patriarchal. A better question is whether the creation text is positive to women in general or not. Therefore, the problem does not lie with the text *per se*. In my view, the biblical texts can be made positive to women if we recognize the effect on interpretation of cultural studies that lean towards male domination, in the same way that we recognize and critique other cultural tendencies towards oppression, such as slavery and racism.

5. Genesis Creation Narrative in Feminist Hermeneutics

The creation narrative of Genesis 2-3 is the important foundational text within the Old Testament which deals with the creation of humanity. The apostles, church fathers, reformers, theologians and other Bible

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Albrecht also locates six characteristic qualities of Pentecostal spirituality such as "spontaneous leadership, human experiencing of God in worship, the present reality of the Word of God, exercising the gifts of the spirit, ministry and mission. See Albrecht, *Rites in the Spirit*, p. 220.

[31] For the role of the Holy Spirit in hermeneutical process, see Clark. H. Pinnock, "The Work of the Holy Spirit in Hermeneutics," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 2 (1993), pp. 3-23. He writes: "The Spirit is active in the life of the whole Church to interpret the biblical message in languages today. He actualizes the word of God by helping us to restate the message in contemporary terminology and apply it to fresh situations" (p. 16).

interpreters have used these texts to elucidate the man-woman relationship and their separate roles and place in the church and society. Yet the same text has been used by different interpreters to advocate the inferior, the superior and the egalitarian status of woman. This text has been one of the most interpreted, reinterpreted and misinterpreted texts within the Old Testament. Even after centuries of interpretation, analyses and readings of it are numerous. So there is no wonder that the creation narrative of Genesis 2-3 has now become one of the most frequent areas of feminist investigation.

I will deal with only one feminist reading as a paradigm. Let us see how Carol Meyers treats the creation narrative in particular. I do not intend to offer all aspects of her interpretation; rather how she interprets the account of human rebellion and sin and the woman's part in the fall in Gen 3. In line with her hermeneutical stance, she wants to negate the notion of sin in the narrative. To her, the concept of sin and suffering is a later creation. She lists the following reasons for this:

1) There is no explicit reference to sin in the narrative.
2) The aetiological nature of the narrative reduces the human theme of disobedience.
3) There is no vocabulary of sin.
4) The *genre of* the narrative deals with daily living.[32]

According to Meyers the biblical narrative in Genesis 2-3 is myths of origins, and "[t]he characters [man and woman] in the creation story present the *essential* (archetypal) features of human life, not the *first* (prototypical) humans in a historical sense."[33]

We must now ask, however, whether this view can be substantiated. Can the text be read convincingly without recourse to the ideas of sin and rebellion? We begin by examining Gen 2:16–17.

> And the Lord commanded the man, "you may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (NRSV).

It seems to me that the introduction of the intensive verb *zwh* ("to command") is very significant here. In God's dialogue with man and

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[32] C. Meyers, "Gender Roles and Genesis 3:16 Revisited," in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, pp. 118-141 (126-28).

[33] Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, pp. 80-81.

woman in chapter 3 the commonly used verb *'amr* ("to say") is used. The verb *zwh* is used to give a command or a charge in most of the occasions in the Old Testament. So from the very use of the verb it is quite clear that it was an injunction, charge, order or a commandment given to the man concerning the way of life in the garden. After disobedience, the Lord God interrogates the couple repeating the same verb asking, "Have you eaten of the tree which I commanded you not to eat?" In the expulsion scene the verb is repeated again in verse 17.

By eating the fruit both the man and the woman had disobeyed God. It was not at all an ordinary life statement concerning "eating" in a highland setting. Here Meyers' explanation of the term "eating" is only a sociological nuance of the term without considering its meaning in a wider context of the text. The use of the verb *t'akl* with the permanent prohibition *al* ("Thou shall not eat," KJV) shows the same seriousness as in the case of the Decalogue. It is also important to note that the verbs in both verses are given in infinitive absolute forms emphasizing the action.

In the serpent's dialogue with the woman, both the serpent and the woman use the non–intensive and ordinary verb *'amr* instead of *zwh*. The verbal emphasis, (i.e., infinitive absolute) and the preposition *mkl* used in 3:1, are also omitted by the woman in 3:2. The *Yhwh 'elohim* ("the Lord God") becomes merely *'elohim* ("God"). Wenham points out that the Yahwistic author deliberately used *Yhwh 'elohim* to declare his conviction that Yahweh is both the humans' covenant partner and also the God of all creation; yet both the woman and the serpent omitted this expression in their dialogue.[34]

The meaning of *'aph ki* in Gen.3:1 is not clear, though English translations take it as an interrogative form. The BHS proposal to read an interrogative pronoun *h* has no textual support. V. P. Hamilton considers it as a feigned expression of surprise and translates it as "Indeed! To think that God said you are not to eat of any tree of the garden!"[35] Hence

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[34] Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary 1 (Milton Keynes: Word, 1991), p. 57. For a discussion of the various details of the conversation between the woman and the serpent, see R. W. L. Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right?" *Journal of Theological Studies* 39 (1988), pp. 1-27.

[35] See V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 186, and also J. Skinner, *Genesis*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), p. 73 n. 1 takes it as "a half–interrogative, half–reflexive exclamation." Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, pp. 47, 73 treats *'af ki* as an interrogative expression. F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), p. 65 translates the whole expression, "Has God really said?"

he argues that the first words of the serpent are not a question "but as an expression of shock and surprise. He grossly exaggerates God's prohibition, claiming that God did not allow them access to any of the orchard trees."[36] In this context it is also interesting to note that the woman too exaggerates and adds to the original injunction and also omits "every." Wenham suggests that through these slight alterations to God's remarks, "the woman has already moved slightly away from God toward the serpent's attitude."[37] It is important to note here that "[t]he serpent began with a feigned expression of surprise" and later he directed "a frontal attack on God's earlier threat (2:17)."[38]

Richard S. Hess has recently noted the specific aspects of rebellion in Genesis 3.[39] In this context the rebellion involves pride, ignoring or distorting God's word and listening to the serpent. In his view, "Misusing and perhaps misunderstanding God's word lies at the heart of the first rebellion against God."[40] He continues to note the whole motivation of eating the forbidden fruit. It was "to know as God knows, to possess divine wisdom and to seize God's gifts and use them in whatever way the man and the woman wanted."[41]

In light of the above discussion, Wenham argues that Genesis 2–3 is "a paradigm of sin, a model of what happens whenever man disobeys God. It is paradigmatic in that it explains through a story what constitutes sin and what sin's consequences are."[42] Moreover he also thinks that this

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Other occurrences of this phrase are preceded by an interrogative *h* if it introduces a question. See Gen 18:13, 23; Amos 2:11. See also E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1964), p. 21 translates it as "Even though God told you not to eat of any tree in the Garden...." He also thinks that it is not a question; rather the serpent is distorting a fact (p. 23); Also see Jerome T. Walsh, "Genesis 2:4b–3:24: A Synchronic Approach," *JBL* 92 (1977), pp. 161-177 (164).

[36] Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17*, pp. 188-89

[37] Wenham, *Genesis*, p. 73.

[38] Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17*, p. 189.

[39] Richard S. Hess, "The Roles of the Woman and the Man in Genesis 3," *Themelios* 18 (1993), pp. 15-19.

[40] Hess, "The Roles of the Woman and the Man," p. 16.

[41] Hess, "The Roles of the Woman and the Man," p. 17. Hamilton, *Genesis*, p. 191 thinks that woman's sin is a sin of initiative and man's is a sin of acquiescence.

[42] Wenham, *Genesis*, p. 90.

tradition is found in the covenant theology where disobedience to God's commandments leads to a curse and ultimately death (Deut 30:15-19). According to Wenham this story is also protohistorical, offering an explanation regarding origin of humans and their sin.[43] We also read from the text that "the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living" (Gen 3:20). So the creation narrative has, after all, a prototypical value, not an archetypal value as proposed by Meyers. In other words it is the first account of how sin and rebellion entered this world. As such, it is a fitting beginning to the Old Testament story, in which we see the subsequent effects of sin and how God deals with it. As a matter of fact Meyers contradicts herself in this point. She assumes that Gen 3 reflects a highland situation, as it was "God's words to the *first man*, every man, with respect to the laborious character of his daily life, so also is it the case for the *first woman,* every woman."[44] But when she dealt with the question of sin, she found it to have only archetypal value, being an etiological tale. If so, how can it be the story of every woman?

This view is also supported by prominent Old Testament scholars. In his study Rolf Rendtorff shows how the creation in Genesis and the covenant in Exodus 19-34 are endangered by human sin in both cases. He also points out that sin reaches its culmination in chapter 6 where God determined to destroy his own creation.[45] Richard H. Moye thinks, "the story of the Pentateuch as a whole is pre-eminently the story of the fall,"[46] and human desire for a reunion with God.

Both traditional historical critics and modern literary critics read the narrative as a story of sin. I do not think this can fairly be regarded as a result of their male bias. In their readings they bring out various aspects of this theme. In his comprehensive analysis of the book of Genesis, for instance, Gerhard von Rad shows how sin reaches its culmination from the sins of Adam and Eve to the Tower of Babel. He sees the spread and progression of sin from Adam and Eve to Cain, Lamech, the angel

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[43] Wenham, *Genesis*, pp. 90-91.

[44] Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, pp. 93-94. Emphasis mine.

[45] See Rolf Rendtorff, "'Covenant' as a Structuring Concept in Genesis and Exodus," *JBL* 108 (1989), pp. 385-89 (386).

[46] Richard H. Moye, "In the Beginning: Myth and History in Genesis and Exodus," *JBL* 109 (1990), pp. 577-598 (598).

marriages, and the tower of Babel.[47] He also notes the result of sin in every situation. Hence commenting on this situation he writes:

> This succession of narratives, therefore, points out a continually widening chasm between man and God. But God reacts to these outbreaks of human sin with severe judgments. The punishment of Adam and Eve was severe; severer still was Cain's. Then followed the Flood, and the final judgement was the Dispersion, the dissolution of mankind's unity.[48]

In his treatment of the theme of the Pentateuch, Clines also observes the concept of sin in other various details. His analysis of the theme of Gen 1-11 considers "sin" to be the main theme in the primeval history.[49] According to him the theme of primeval history seems to be:

> [Either] mankind tends to destroy what God has made good. Even when God forgives human sin and mitigates the punishment, sin continues to spread, to the point where the world suffers uncreation.... Or no matter how drastic man's sin becomes, destroying what God has made good and bringing the world to the brink of uncreation, God's grace never fails to deliver man from the consequences of his sin.[50]

He also links the primeval history with the rest of the Pentateuch through the theme of God's promise.

Alan J. Hauser in his rhetorical reading of the creation narrative finds intimacy and alienation as one of the main themes of Gen 2-3. He points out that harmony and intimacy existed between the man, the woman and God before the human rebellion. This situation was changed as a result of their rebellion by eating the fruit which God had told them not to. He also notes the motif of alienation and strife at various levels between man and woman, man and the ground, humans and the animal

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[47] See G. von Rad, *Genesis*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (London: SCM, 1961), p. 149. See also von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (London: SCM, 1975), pp. 154-56.

[48] Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 148.

[49] David J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, JSOTS 10 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), pp. 61-79.

[50] Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, p. 76. Cf. Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (London: Tyndale, 1967), p. 13 makes a contrast between "God's orderly creation and the disintegrating work of sin."

world, and humanity and God.[51] Contrary to Meyers' claim, Hauser notes that '*akl* is the main verb which describes human rebellion against God (Gen 3:1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 11, 12, 13). He also observes that the same verb is used in relation to the consequences that follow their rebellion (Gen 3:17-19).[52] Similarly P. D. Miller also relates the term '*akl* with sin: "The word is a command that has to do altogether with eating '*akl* four times, i.e., what may be eaten and what may not be eaten. The whole issue of responsibility and obedience is tied up with 'eating.'"[53]

When we examine the Old Testament in a wider perspective, there is no difficulty in understanding the concept of sin which emerged in the story of creation in the context of human rebellion. Contrary to Meyers' assumptions that the concept of sin comes from later orphic thought, there are clear parallels in the Old Testament traditions concerning Eden and human rebellion (Ezek 28:13; 31:9, 16, 18; 36:35; Isa 51:3; Joel 2:3). In Ezekiel 28:12-19 we can find a similar narrative structure and many similar motifs. The context here is the *hubris* of the king of Tyre. In Ezekiel we see the creation themes like Eden, the garden of God, Cherub, iniquity, sin and expulsion. The main difference in Ezekiel is that he places the garden on the mountain of God. My intention here is to point out that within Israel there was a strong tradition concerning the rebellion and fall of humanity. Von Rad notes the apparent relation of this material in Ezekiel with Genesis 3.[54] He finds its origin in common oriental Mesopotamian sources.[55] Westermann also finds very clear parallels between Ezekiel and Genesis 2-3 and points to the Babylonian background of the latter.[56] Wenham underscores the fact that "whether this is an independent account of the fall or a free poetic application to the Tyrian king is uncertain, but it certainly underlines the compatibility of its theology with prophetic principle."[57]

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[51] Alan Jon Hauser, "Genesis 2-3: The Theme of Intimacy and Alienation," in *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature,* pp. 20-36.

[52] Hauser, "Genesis 2-3," p. 32.

[53] P. D. Miller, *Genesis 1–11*: *Studies in Structure and Theme*, JSOTS 8 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978), p. 28.

[54] Von Rad, *Genesis,* p. 95.

[55] Von Rad, *Genesis,* p. 95.

[56] Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, trans. J. J. Scullion (London: SPCK; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), p. 246.

[57] Wenham, *Genesis*, p. 90.

We turn now to another of Meyers' themes, namely "eating." Meyers argued that eating was the main theme of the narrative, basing her argument mainly on the frequent occurrence of the term *'kl.* She also treated Gen 2:15 as the material basis for human life, where man is given the oracle to work and keep the garden. The frequent occurrence of a term is not the only criterion, however, to decide the main theme of any narrative. We need to look at how this term functions in the narrative as a whole. For instance, James Barr has convincingly shown that words have meaning only in their context. Hence he writes: "the distinctiveness of biblical thought and language has to be settled at the sentence level, that is, by the things the writers say, and not by the words they say them with."[58] We also need to be aware that *'akl* is one of the most frequently occurring verbs in the whole Old Testament. Does this mean that "eating" is the main theme of the Old Testament?[59]

We must also distinguish the oracle in Gen 2:15 with Gen 3:17. Even though the man is assigned to work in both texts, in the first, man is assigned to work inside the garden. There the work seems to be more pleasant due to the favorable situation, whereas in Gen. 3 man is driven outside the garden where his work is pleasant no more and the working condition is hostile due to the cursing of the ground. Trible notes that the verb *'bd* ("to serve") implies respect, reverence and worship.[60] Meyers failed to distinguish between the condition of work inside the garden and outside. In this connection Meyers also fails to explain the reasons for the changed or "condemned" state of the earth though she recognizes that the ground is accursed.

6. Some Further Challenges of Feminist Hermeneutics on Pentecostal Spirituality

Feminist readers have constantly and vigorously challenged the authority of the Bible as God's word and its relevance to Christian faith and practice. Some of them even assert that the "scripture is a human

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[58] James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 270. See also J. Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1983), pp. 170-71.

[59] It is estimated that the word *'akl* occurs 809 times in the Hebrew Bible, see *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, ed. David J. A. Clines (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), vol. I, p. 240.

[60] P. Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (London: SCM, 1992), p. 85.

product and instrument, and therefore, culturally conditioned and limited."[61] In her view, the authority of Scripture does not lie with the infallible words of the text or model behavior, "but in the truth of its witness to a creating and redeeming power, which can and must be known as a present reality".[62] Carol Meyers says: "Like most scholars, I do not believe the texts are the direct word of God…I believe it is a record of the religious beliefs developed by a society struggling to understand God and the world"[63] She is mainly interested in "social reality rather than textual representation."[64] Again, for many feminists biblical authority does not reside with the text; rather in the "present reality," that is feminist experience. For instance, to them whatever promotes the full humanity of women is held to be holy, as the authentic message of redemption. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza argues that a "feminist hermeneutics cannot trust or accept the Bible and tradition simply as divine revelation." She thinks that authority lies not in the "special canon of the texts" but in "the experience of women." Again, Fiorenza advocates that since the biblical texts are patriarchal products "[a] feminist hermeneutics cannot trust or accept the Bible and tradition simply as divine revelation". [65] If experience takes the place of the revealed canon as Fiorenza suggested, then feminist authority will have to stand on the subjective feelings of women. The canonicity of the Bible is at stake. This would create either a "canon within the canon" or a "canon outside the canon." Moreover, many feminists uproot the biblical text from its original historical-religious setting, and find in it their own interests and concerns.

Generally feminists consider the Bible in the same way as they would any other piece of literature. But this is arguably inappropriate. We ought to remember that the Bible has served as the scripture for the community of faith for centuries. Therefore, the Bible needs to be treated as a special case as it is not a text like all other texts. It could still speak

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[61] Phyllis Bird, "The Authority of the Bible," in *The New Interpreters Bible*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), pp. 34-64 (62).

[62] Bird, "The Authority of the Bible," p. 63.

[63] As cited by William Sasser, "All About Eve," *Duke Magazine*, September-October, 1994, pp. 2-7 (3).

[64] Personal interview with C. Meyers at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, USA, in November, 1994.

[65] E. Schussler Fiorenza, *Bread Note Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon, 1984), p. x.

and function in the lives of the present community of readers who actualize and acknowledge this dimension of the text and its potentiality. Since the religious community considers the text as authoritative, they want to hear "what the text means." They consider the biblical text as the revelation of God and it functions as the scripture not only in their belief and practice but also it is the basis for the formulation of doctrine and belief.

7. Conclusion

Feminist readings cannot claim universal significance as the outlook and value of each culture is different from others. For instance, from a Jewish perspective, alleging the biblical texts as patriarchal is tantamount to anti-Semitism. As a whole the Indian cultural and social situation provides only a subordinate role to women. Girls are considered to be a burden and boys an asset to the parents in the dominant Hindu Indian culture. Female feticide, dowry death, bride burning, child marriage, even Sati and similar atrocities against females are still common in modern India. In that cultural context, the value and the honor which the Bible attributes to women is arguably far greater than any other religion could offer to Indian women. Contrary to western feminist thinking, the Bible, even in the context of traditional interpretations of it, is not enslaving for Indian women; rather it is a source of liberation for them. Therefore, some aspects of feminist hermeneutics (especially their understanding of the nature of the word of God) need to be viewed with hermeneutics of suspicion and to be resisted.