

# **Reading Luke In Impoverished Communities: A social-scientific and feminist hermeneutical approach to Luke 1:39-56 and 4:16-30**

by

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## **Abstract**

This study is primarily concerned with responsible and considerate interpretations of the Bible as sacred book in faith communities. The question of poverty and its related issues compelled me to ask the question: how can the gospels be good news for Christians in impoverished communities in South Africa?

It is the opinion of this study that method of interpretation is the crux of the matter when it comes to extracting good news from the Bible. In chapter one I propose that a social scientific approach in combination with feminist hermeneutics is a good method of interpreting biblical texts in impoverished communities. The social sciences help to place the text in its proper context and give the reader a point of connection between his or her social location and that of the text. Feminist hermeneutics seeks the marginalised and silent voices in the text with the aim of transformation on the contemporary context.

In the second chapter of this study I explore the vital social values of the first century AD Mediterranean world as premise of the selected texts for exegesis (Luke 1:39-56 and 4:16-30). The third and fourth chapters form the exegetical corps of the study. In both I look at how the social values identified in chapter two influenced and shaped the texts. The latter part of both these chapters looks at a very specific feminist hermeneutical model which ultimately seeks transformation. Chapter three deals with Luke 1: 39-56 as pericope whilst chapter four deals with Luke 4:16-30.

Chapter five focuses on the correlation of the findings in the exegesis of chapter three and chapter four. This chapter also gives some implications with concrete examples of a way forward from the interpretation of the text to the application of the text. I propose a Christian development of communities as a possible consequence of reading and interpreting the Bible through the lenses of a social scientific approach in conjunction with feminist hermeneutics. The last chapter, chapter six, is an overview and conclusion to this study.

## Opsomming

Hierdie studie is hoofsaaklik gemoeid met verantwoordelike en bedagsame interpretasies van die Bybel as die heilige boek in geloof-gemeenskappe. Die kwessie van armoede en verwante kwessies het my genoop om die vraag te vra: hoe kan die evangelies goeie nuus wees vir Christene in arm gemeenskappe in Suid-Afrika?

Dit is die mening van hierdie studie dat die metode van interpretasie die kern van die saak is in die ontsluiting van goeie nuus uit die Bybel. In hoofstuk een stel ek voor dat 'n sosiaal-wetenskaplike benadering in kombinasie met feministiese hermeneutiek 'n goeie metode vir die interpretasie van Bybelse tekste is in verarmde gemeenskappe.

Die sosiale wetenskappe help om die teks in sy behoorlike konteks te plaas en gee die leser 'n punt van verband tussen sy of haar sosiale ligging en dié van die teks. Feministiese hermeneutiek soek die gemarginaliseerde en stil stemme in die teks met die doel van transformasie in die hedendaagse konteks.

In die tweede hoofstuk van hierdie studie ondersoek ek die belangrike sosiale waardes van die eerste eeu nC Mediterreense wêreld as uitgangspunt vir eksegeese van die geselekteerde tekste (Lukas 1:39-56 en 4:16-30). Die derde en vierde hoofstukke vorm die eksegetiese korps van die studie. In albei het ek gekyk na hoe die sosiale waardes wat in hoofstuk twee geïdentifiseer word, hierdie tekste beïnvloed en gevorm het. Die laaste deel van beide hierdie hoofstukke kyk na 'n baie spesifieke feministiese hermeneutiese model wat uiteindelik tot transformasie lei. Hoofstuk drie handel oor Lukas 1: 39-56 as perikoop, terwyl hoofstuk vier oor Lukas 4:16-30 handel.

Hoofstuk vyf fokus op die korrelasie van die bevindinge in die eksegeese van hoofstuk drie en hoofstuk vier. Hierdie hoofstuk gee ook 'n paar implikasies met konkrete voorbeelde van 'n pad vorentoe vanaf die interpretasie van die teks tot die toepassing van die teks. Ek stel 'n Christelike ontwikkeling van gemeenskappe voor as 'n moontlike uitkoms van die lees en interpretasie van die Bybel deur die lens van

'n sosiaal-wetenskaplike benadering in samehang met feministiese hermeneutiek.  
Die laaste hoofstuk, hoofstuk ses, is 'n oorsig en samevatting van die studie.

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I dedicate this thesis to my family and friends, and to my community, where I grew up, Tarka, Mosselbay. To my dear parents Jacobus and Brenda Petersen, and my sister Veagen, I express my deepest and genuine thanks for their love, warmth and support that kept me going. You shaped, and made me the man that I am today, and much of what prompted me to write this thesis relates to you. Today I cannot give you money or riches but I give you my love and this thesis as result of what you invested in my. Thank you, Baie, Baie, Baie Dankie, mag God julle seën.

I pray that the insights I gained through this thesis might be used to the extension of God's kingdom on earth and that this thesis may be to God a *sacrificium laudis*, a sacrifice of praise

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## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

I grew up in a community that used to provide its members with safety and where people respected each other in terms of common humanity, and property. However, today the situation has changed dramatically and people live in fear of crime/theft/drug abuse and so forth. Consequently, various questions arise: where and in what form is the Bible still good news to people living in a community like this? What is the role of faith communities, especially Christian communities whose sacred book bears a special section called the gospels, in such situations? How can the gospels be good news to people whose social sphere consists of more bad news than good?

### 1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

One of the most inspiring verses in the Bible is probably Luke 4: 18 -19 “The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”

Given my context, alluded to above, I have been struggling for a long time with the notion of “good news”. Newspapers and media sources all over the world and locally announce bad news on a daily basis. Politics in South Africa, arguably, consist out of more bad news flavoured issues than news items that can be called good news. It seems that one just has to open one’s eyes to see the effects of bad news, whereas one has to go on a journey of exploration to find some that’s good.

The New Testament gospels play an important role in Christian communities. Sermons are often based on texts from the New Testament gospels. However there remains a breach between the biblical text, with its own structures, conventions, world views, politics and so forth, and that of modern or postmodern times.

This study presupposes that the Bible has become a text irrelevant to modern Christians in impoverished communities due to the inability of biblical interpreters to allow biblical texts to interact creatively with the social events and setting of such Christians. The Bible through its recognized interpreters in such communities (in particular the clergy), too often still seems to be the subject and property of academic and ecclesiastical institutions, and not a text shaped (and reshaped) by the cultural and social forces of readers through the centuries of Christian history. Furthermore the irrelevance of the Bible seems to coincide with a linear understanding of meaning which is the result of interpretation that is un-contextual. The average Christian in impoverished communities does not fully comprehend the value and relevance of biblical interpretation due to the lack of empowerment to realize such values and potential.

Consequently it would be important to investigate how biblical texts can be interpreted in such a way that it allows the believer to feel that the text speaks to his or her situation, that is, in such a way that the person feels driven to make a difference to his or her life setting or at the least find solace in the text outside of the institutional interpretation of the text.

With the above in mind, as well as the initial question of how the gospel can be good news to impoverished and crime infested communities, this study wants to consider whether the gospel according to Luke can be used as particularly appropriate New Testament gospel to seek an alternative to contemporary, uncritical interpretation. Luke gives precedence to the poor and highlights ethical decision making as part of community life and anticipates God's intervention. Emphasizing such factors will hopefully lead to transformative practices in communities such as the one that I grew up in or at the very least pose challenges to the status quo.

### 1.3 HYPOTHESIS

History has the tendency to repeat itself and thus we find great significance in new things, just till we get used to them, and unsurprisingly sometimes find that what we view as new, is actually old, as often happens in fashion and design. Likewise old remedies very often, like quotations of antiquity, carry more weight when considering their significance, as opposed to their more modern counterparts, due to the fact that time proved them to be effective and socially approved. In other words the very fact that something old survives and adopts alternative modes of manifestation shows its development did not take place in an isolated vacuum. There are diachronic elements that give meaning and value to these things. Such elements will include cultural and personal experiences that were affected in some way by the occurrence of the events or manifestations of entities that survived the test of time, and out of these personal or cultural experiences get born the social approval or disapproval which becomes a measure stick for the meaning that gets attached to it.

Similarly the Bible is a product of a complex web of various social elements, (however, not exclusively social) time and cultural influences, history, experience, politics, reception by faith communities and so forth, and the primary point of connection for Christians, to connect with this integrated web, is through their own social setting otherwise the Bible becomes a secondary and sometimes irrelevant or dead text only to be used on Sundays.

It is the opinion of this study that historical critical approaches reduce the Bible to its historical worth and fails to address the spiritual and social needs of modern readers (outside of academic circles) of the Bible. In fact it promotes a notion of isolated development of the Bible as sacred text of believers. It implies that knowing the history of the text can somehow effect change in a very complicated world in which the Bible operates as sacred text. This study is further of the opinion that greater attention needs to be paid in biblical interpretations to the components that constitute the meeting point of modern reader and text in order for the text to be relevant and transformative.

Therefore this study proposes that in order to address the needs of readers of the Bible, and believers in impoverished communities there need to be methodological approaches that allow interpreters of the Bible to engage with the Bible on the root levels of believers, namely their social situation. This study is of the opinion that a combination of hermeneutical methods such as the social sciences and feminist hermeneutics is one way of addressing the perceived irrelevance of the Bible in impoverished communities.

The application of the New Testament through hermeneutical methods such as the social sciences and feminist hermeneutics has the potential to be a tool of empowerment that can contribute to the emancipation of impoverished communities in South Africa if one analyses the text (Luke) in its original setting, namely first century AD Mediterranean, with a specific interest in the socio-historical issues and values that underlines this gospel and then seek points of connection, comparison and illumination with today's South African context.

Luke's potential as tool of empowerment and meeting point of believer (especially believers of impoverished communities) and sacred text can be noticed in the way that Luke gives expression to the good news that Jesus proclaims. Whereas the gospel of Mark for example talks about the kingdom of God that had drawn near (Mark 1:14-15) Luke shows interest in the situational issues of the people Jesus ministered to, thus he puts emphasis on "the son of Man came to seek and save what was lost" Luke 19:10. The soteriological aspects of Jesus' ministry and gospel find concrete/social expression in Luke unlike the other gospels. Thus salvation in Luke implies emancipation and transformation (Luke 4:16-30) of the social elements that binds the poor and oppressed. Women and children also get precedence in the gospel and through giving them a voice (Luke 1:46-56) Luke helps with creating new meaning out of social events, conventions, and patterns that have been traditionally working against the poor, oppressed, and the voiceless.

Luke's gospel more often than not, has socio relational implications as a result of the actions or teaching of one of its main characters (e.g. in 1: 39-56 the Song of Mary the *Magnificat*; Luke 3: 10-14 the demand that goes with the call to repentance of John the Baptist; 4: 16- 29 the "mission statement" of Jesus) and so forth.

Awareness of such socio relational implications can help the reader to construct new meaning with the text(s) in Luke. This meaning is created when reader and text encounter each other. In the light of the meaning created here what used to be an ecclesial/religious aspect on Sundays, can now also become a social aspect in the life of the believer. "The social sciences help us to recognize that our acts of interpretation are not neutral. They are affected by who we are and to whom we belong" (Barton, 1995:73). Thus through appropriate interpretation founded on appropriate methods ( a social sciences approach and feminist hermeneutic approach) the text has potential to reshape, re-establish or redefine our identity not only as believers but as people, something which I think is essential in the process of emancipating impoverished communities.

The hypothesis of this study claims that the problem(s) as stated in the problem statement can be rectified by applying integrated hermeneutical approaches such as the social sciences and feminist hermeneutics to biblical interpretation. Scrutinizing biblical texts through social scientific criticism will set the platform for ordinary Christians to make the link with their own social setting, whilst feminist hermeneutics sets the scene for seeking the voices and opinions of the marginal figures in society. In other words a social scientific/feminist interpretation of the New Testament will be the first step in making the gospel good news to people in impoverished communities. This paper proposes Luke 1:46-56 and 4:16-30, as specific texts out of Luke as the premises for the development of the argument based on the foresaid hypothesis.

#### **1.4 METHODOLOGIES TO BE USED**

This study will be conducted in the form of a Literature review on the socio-historical background of the New Testament and specifically the gospel of Luke. In addition to the literature review, I will also do exegesis on the selected texts (Luke 1:46-56 and 4:16-30). The overarching method that will be applied to the exegetical aspects of this study will be the social scientific method. This method will be employed to investigate the social and cultural conditions, factors and forces that shaped the selected texts and similar texts. At the same time social scientific approaches and

interpretation, deployed through socio exegesis, will be used to consider a contemporary and contextual application of the selected texts.

Seeing that this study is not merely interested in the author's intention or literary criticism, the method will also incorporate a feminist hermeneutical approach in its exegetical endeavours, seeing that feminist and liberationist hermeneutics are interested in the experience of the poor oppressed and women as well as societal transformation, something which this study hope to achieve and at the very least advocate for. The relationship between feminist and liberation hermeneutics stem from their connection through liberation theology. However the link between these two and the social sciences are not so clear cut. I am of the opinion that the social sciences are an excellent complement for feminist and liberation theology and vice versa. The social sciences just as feminist and liberationist thoughts are used or initially were used as a reaction to a lack in or un-addressed areas of biblical studies. All three also take serious the social aspects of their subject matter. Furthermore the named methods seems to aim at transformation of some sort whether it is political (as in the case of liberationist thoughts), theological, social and structural (as in the case of feminist), or cross-cultural and understanding of cultural differences (as in the case of the social sciences). Having said this, the study does not intend to use liberation theology as a separate method in exploring the text or interpretation. The method that will complement the social scientific approach will be feminist theological hermeneutics which in itself might make use of liberationist hermeneutics elements. "For liberationist hermeneutics the goal of interpretation is...to integrate biblical interpretation into an agenda of personal conversion and societal transformation" (Schneiders, 1995: 349).

Thus this study proposes that the social sciences be used to bridge the cultural gap between the text and the modern day context. The social scientific method will be used to investigate themes of the selected texts, themes that will help with transformative practices in impoverished communities. During the exegetical process the feminist method will be deployed to seek for silent or oppressed voices or the experiences of the oppressed and marginal. These voices and experiences will then be worked into the themes where after social scientific elements will be used to make implicational links with the context of impoverished communities today.



## **1.5 DELIMITATION OF AREA OF RESEARCH**

In seeking the potential of the gospel of Luke as liberating text for impoverished communities in South Africa, I will limit the research of this study to the gospel of Luke chapters 1 and 4 specifically the texts as indicated earlier. This study will investigate these texts of Luke without compromising the canonical message of the gospel. In other words while I will be open to the influence of the rest of the Bible on Luke and vice versa, I will mainly concentrate and use material as they relate to these texts from Luke. Also, whereas this work proposes and argues for the use of social-scientific and feminist approaches in interpretation, it does not want to reduce or claim these approaches as the only or normative methods. It rather wishes to assist in pointing out that the reductionist tendencies of 'normative' methods should not go unchallenged.

This will not be a theological argument for or against the historicity of Luke and its original setting; neither will it be a comparative study between first century socio-historical Mediterranean communities and South African impoverished communities. It will rather just be a theoretical starting point for hopeful later studies of comparison and cross-cultural readings of the socio-historical subject matter of first century Palestine and South Africa. My concern is with interpreting the Bible and particularly the New Testament in such a way that it transforms the lives of faith communities.

## **1.6 PROPOSED OUTLINE OF STUDY**

This study will consist out of six chapters with the proposal serving as the first chapter and the conclusion as the last. The second chapter will consist of a thematic study on the socio-historical setting of the Gospel according to Luke where in will be considered the core elements and values for first century Mediterranean society. The third and fourth chapter will comprise out of exegetical work on the selected chapters from the gospel of Luke (1 and 4) using social-scientific and feminist hermeneutics. The fifth chapter will explore aspects related to possible invigorated readings of the Gospel of Luke within and for impoverished communities based on the results of the preceding chapters.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **SOCIO-HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE GOSPEL OF LUKE: THE CORE VALUES AND ELEMENTS THAT GOVERNED THE FIRST CENTURY MEDITERRANEAN SOCIETIES.**

#### **2.1 WHY LOOK AT THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE FIRST CENTURY MEDITERRANEAN SOCIETY?**

One of my most embarrassing moments up until this day, occurred on the 16<sup>th</sup> of January 2008. I was on an exchange program, at Ripon Theological College Cuddeston England, for three months and that specific day I arrived fresh from the coastal town of Mosselbay in South Africa with its nice summer weather. Needless to say, to people who know England, it was raining cats and dogs when I got there. My best defence was a winter jacket, suitable for the winter of Grahamstown (where the College of Transfiguration is, the residential College I studied at), yet nothing close to the best fit for such a day. At least the umbrella diverted most of the water. The uneasiness came when we had supper in the dining hall. It was only after I got introduced and the eating commenced that someone at my table made the remark “poor Darian he’s so cold and must be missing the heat of Africa because he’s having his supper while wearing his jacket”

I still go red when I think about it. A few things in my defence: at the college where I was in South Africa, the customs and rituals of eating were very, very informal. Dress code was pretty much the last thing on your mind when you go to the dining hall (one was more concerned with hoping that you get a piece of meat) some people even came in their pyjamas. Secondly we had no central heating in our buildings so when it’s cold outside it is colder inside the buildings.

What I am trying to get at, is that my customs, geographical circumstances, traditions, rituals, and mindset in South Africa, were totally different to those of the students at Cuddeston and because I did not know the setting and customs of that place it caused me a bit of embarrassment when I engaged with that context.

The same dynamics are involved when we engage with the Bible. As twenty-first century people very often with a Western concept of meaning and believing, we step into an unknown world with its own settings of social, historical, economic, and political elements which might cause us embarrassment or even disbelief if we engage with the world of the Bible on our own terms and conditions. Bruce Malina equates this sort of scenario to the reader being a foreigner in the exceptionally strange land of the first century eastern Mediterranean world (Malina 1996: 4). Each text (whether we think of text as dead or alive)<sup>1</sup> exists of a multitude of elements connected to each other in a very intricate web and in order for an outsider to understand the essence of the text; he or she will need to look at the primary threads of the web. One of the main veins in any text is the socio-historical background. Therefore it is important to have some knowledge of the socio-historical background should one wish to engage meaningful with the text.

While it is true that the nature of one's engagement with the Bible determines the objectives, it is also true that one has to adhere to certain paradigms when dealing with a text like the Bible. Therefore for example when one deals with the Bible as a guide to spiritual growth then the objectives might exclude historical data and the social setting of the people in the text. However the paradigm of Christian knowledge<sup>2</sup> might still be applicable and within this paradigm of Christian knowledge we further find frameworks that interact with scientific<sup>3</sup> readings of the same texts that can lead to spiritual growth. One of these frameworks that form an overarching point of reference for various specific readings of biblical texts is the socio-historical framework. No text can exist outside a social-historical framework. However this does not discharge the socio-historical framework-models (employed by interpreters of the socio-historical milieu) from its weaknesses and short comings. For example the models that will be used in this study namely social sciences and feminist

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the notions of authors like Jacques Derrida and Hans-Georg Gadamer who claimed that texts are much more than mere dead letters or words. "Both thinkers saw texts as constituted not by dead letters but by living words. Gadamer went so far as to claim that a text does not fully exist except in the moment in which it is read and understood" (Benson 2005: 32).

<sup>2</sup> All reading is an act of obtaining knowledge, whether that knowledge gets deconstructed or reconstructed or even uncritically internalized it remains an investigative process which in turn is subject to the greater paradigm of knowledge (in this case Christian knowledge).

<sup>3</sup> Scientific readings here mean technical reading of the text with specific technical skills e.g. historical critical reading.

hermeneutics can very easily be accused of anachronisms or of driving a political or social concern of the interpreter: “While often providing useful correctives for traditional theoretical models, they are also inclined to be ideological. In the name of ‘science’ they offer a weighty rationalization to support social programs often built on flimsy foundations” (Heddendorf 1983: 185). Nevertheless the method and models of socio-historical investigation holds much potential as interpretative tool(s). The above caution should keep us mindful not to assert certain methods or models as absolute and universal. The combinations of models employed under the umbrella of socio-historical investigation in this work will be especially helpful in two ways as Heddendorf points out:

“First, scripture is used to understand how sociological principles are employed in scripture. Second, this understanding may be used to sharpen the meaning of the principles as used in modern sociology. In either case, we learn to interpret the changing meaning of concepts and how the Christian is to deal with the problems they refer to” (Heddendorf 1983: 189).

### **2.1.1 Ideologies or values**

Having established the reason(s) why we ought to look at the socio-historical background of the Bible and specifically the New Testament (in particular the first century Mediterranean as premises for the texts that will be dealt with later on) we now have to setup boundaries as to what is essential when investigating the socio-historical background of the text. Once again we should take caution at this point. Socio-historical background here does not refer to an empirical study of history or a historicity of the text “Only when social sciences are limited to the study of social change can history make useful contribution” (Heddendorf 1983: 187). The socio-historical background is merely the framework which gives focus to an otherwise multi-dimensional picture. The essences of what drives this work is the will to interpret the New Testament in such a way that I would at least understand the text according to the first-century Mediterranean context and accompanying perspectives as a first century person from the Mediterranean would have understood it.

In order to do so, one needs to know more about how the first century person of the Mediterranean would have understood him or herself, their social patterns, values, belief systems, politics, and economic factors. But before we investigate these values and patterns let us consider if we are to deal with ideologies or values or both. D.F. Eickelman makes us aware of the fact that the usage of the word ideology in current popular use often implies something 'illusory' or 'unreal' (Eickelman 1981: 85). Karl Marx thought of ideology as a falsification of reality in the interest of class domination and the maintaining of the interest of the dominant groups in society implying that ideology has a vivid socio-political and economic character. On the other hand for Paul Tillich, ideology cannot be reduced to the social reality of society. For him (Tillich) ideology is a consequence of trying to understand the concept of knowledge which leads into a search for truth. In the end Tillich concludes that ideology becomes a theological reflection rather than a sociological reflection (O'Keefe 1983: 301-304).

Given the above views on ideology, I would tend to go with the Marx concept rather than the Tillich idea because not only is there sufficient room for exploration in the Marx theory, but it also moves from a point of departure that critically engage the discrepancies in social structures (such as the gap between rich and poor) which is a particular interest of this study. I therefore tend to agree with the following statement by Eickelman:

"Ideologies inform social practice and provide it with meaning...The authors of such a classical discussion as *The German Ideology* insisted that ideologies shape and in turn are shaped by the particular social, economic, and historical formations in which they occur...the term ideology encompasses a wider set of notions than formal ideologies alone. Anthropologists and many other social theorists are additionally concerned by largely implicit shared assumptions concerning such basic aspects of the social order as notions of tribe, kinship, family ...and world view" (Eickelman 1981: 85-86).

Compare this with what Kroeber, Kluckhohn, and Unterreiner describe as culture:

"Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups,

including their embodiments in artefacts: the essential core of culture consist of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning influences upon further action “ (Kroeber, Kluckhohn and Unterreiner in Malina 1993: 33).

It is important to compare this notion of culture with Pilch and Malina’s understanding of values:

“The word ‘value’ describes some general quality and direction of life that human beings are expected to embody in their behaviour. A value is a general, normative orientation of action in a social system. It is an emotionally anchored commitment to pursue and support certain directions or types of actions...at an abstract level, values...bear no reference to specific goals or specific situations. Giving a general value a specific content or meaning results from institutionalization...In order to realize values, human beings create and utilize social institutions. A social institution is like a set of railroad tracks of a specific and or goal” (Pilch and Malina 2000: xv-xvii).

It should be clear from the above that Ideology, culture, and values have overlapping elements constituting one another, and it is difficult to draw a clear line between thought pattern and practise of human behaviour as the one informs the other and vice versa. Therefore when dealing with the first century Mediterranean person we will deal with both ideological and value elements, embedded in the culture(s) of the region which shaped their mindset and belief systems.

### 2.1.2 Core values

The first century person like any other person from any period of time found him or herself in a social sphere that can in essence be divided into four building blocks namely: politics, economics, religion, and kinship. These social building blocks are very often so intertwined that it would be difficult to deal with the one without treading upon the area of the other<sup>4</sup>. However, there is always an initial point where one has

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<sup>4</sup> “The four social spheres or domains addressed by social scientists are never discrete entities that operate in isolation from one another-they are interactive in every society. But beyond interaction, one sphere may be

to start from, a threshold, especially if you are the outsider<sup>5</sup>. The threshold into the world of the first century Mediterranean person's social world is kinship, according to Malina.

“Now in the Mediterranean, present and especially past, the focal institution of various Mediterranean societies has been and is kinship. The family is truly everything... When the family is the highlighted institution of concern, then the organizing principle of life is belongingness. Success consists in having and making the right interpersonal connections...A person's identity depends on belonging to and being accepted by the family” (Malina 1993: 30).

It might be helpful to point out here that family or kinship in the first century Mediterranean should not be thought of as a romanticised picture of what we today would think of as the perfect picture of family. The word οἶκος<sup>6</sup> might be a fitting place of departure when dealing with kinship and all its related issues. The household's social location not only gives us a clearer perspective of the New Testament, but also allows us a peak into the heart of what made Rome such a force in the ancient Mediterranean. The household contained and maintained the hierarchical gender, political, and economical status quo that thrived in the public life of the Roman Empire:

“The household or family functioned as the foundational unit of the state in antiquity and was supported by the household codes that served as model of the political order... The household was thus understood to provide the underpinning for the kingdom, serving as a micro version of the state...” (Punt 2010: 155).

Thus the household operated in constructed schemes such as status, gender, and religion which kept the individual and family in line with socially acceptable values.

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embedded in another...its definition, structures, and authority are dictated by another sphere” (Hanson 1996: 63).

<sup>5</sup> Bruce Malina claims that the social boundary markers (such as power, gender status, and religion) and where they meet leads the reader into the most fundamental value of the first century Mediterranean world namely honor but honor cannot be understood without placing it in the larger picture of what it meant to in relation to others. The primary relation from which all other relationships stem is kinship (Malina 1993: 30-31; cf Eickelman 1981: 105; Hanson 1996: 62-63; Pilch and Malina 2000: 75-78).

<sup>6</sup> “In biblical times a household would consist of more than the nuclear family, that is to say, more than simply husband, wife, and children, for servants, slaves, and permanent hired workers living with the family would be regarded as a part of the total household” (Louw & Nida 1989).

However these societal pleasing elements should not be mistaken for beneficial space of pleasant living conditions<sup>7</sup>. One should rather read it in the light of the pivotal values of honor and shame. “Under the influence of interpretations of Mediterranean anthropological studies brought into biblical scholarship, students of early Christianity are now accustomed to thinking of ancient Mediterranean societies as honor-shame cultures...” (Osiek 2006: 833).

## 2.2 HONOR AND SHAME

Pilch and Malina describe honor and shame as follows: “Honor is a claim worth that is publicly acknowledged. To have honor is to have publicly acknowledged worth... Shame, as the opposite of honor, is a claim to worth that is publicly denied and repudiated” (Pilch and Malina 2000: 106-107; cf Malina 1993: 30). Similar to this understanding of honor and shame is that of Julian A. Pitt-Rivers: honor and Shame are reciprocal moral values representing primordial integration of individual to “group”. They respectively reflect the conferral of public esteem upon the person, and the sensitivity to public opinion upon which the former depends (Pitt-Rivers 1965:42). Malina’s approach to “modern ethnography and ancient primary sources” culminated in a model of honor and shame that’s well respected in biblical studies (Crook 2009: 592). The works of scholars like Pitt-Rivers and Malina on honor and shame, enjoy scholarly appraisal and proved to be effective model(s) to work with (especially the latter scholar’s work) “...many scholars of biblical antiquity have benefited from the explanatory power of Malina's model, an influence not limited to those affiliated with the Context Group” (Crook 2009: 592). However, there has been

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<sup>7</sup> Carolyn Osiek points out the greater part of the Roman Empire lived in fairly or extremely poor living conditions. “We can learn a great deal from the remains of housing, especially what little is preserved of the lower classes and poorer inhabitants of the cities. The dark, cramped quarters of one- and two-room apartments like those of some multiple-residences buildings of Herculaneum, Pompeii, and Ostia, or the small back and upper rooms of shops in places like the main street in Ephesus are examples of the crowded, poorly ventilated, and generally unhealthy conditions in which most of the urban population lived. If such people cooked for themselves at all, it would have to have been on some makeshift portable apparatus in a nearby outside space. More likely, they bought fresh bread, fruit, and vegetables at local markets and got most of their cooked food from neighbourhood vendors and *thermopolia* – the equivalent of fast food restaurants. They ate meat rarely if at all, typically only when present at feasts given by wealthy city patrons. If they bathed, it was in the public baths, apparently open to both men and women. They used public latrines” (Osiek 2006: 821-822) and further more we have to be careful of anachronism when thinking about the family, living conditions and societal roles of men and women (cf Punt 2010: 154-156; Malina 1993: 30-32).



criticism against this notion of honor and shame as pivotal values of the ancient Mediterranean.

F.Gerald Downing is one of the scholars that criticize honor and shame as an absolute value(s). He does not deny the fact that honor and shame is part and parcel of the first century Mediterranean world, the problem that he has is that honor and shame get described as pivotal to the Mediterranean “According to some recent social historians of the New Testament, honor and shame are the ‘pivotal social values,’ the ‘core values’ for the Mediterranean world of which Jesus and the first Christians were a part” (Downing 1999: 54). He argues that pivotal implies an exclusivity and dominance “The impression conveyed is that this concern for respect is more than an occasional significant feature, that it is both pervasive and dominant...” (Downing 1999: 54-55) while it only “is *an* issue of which we need to be aware, but that it is only dominant, ‘pivotal,’ central (the ‘core’) when, and where, it is clearly shown to be.” (Downing 1999: 55; also see Wikan 1984: 635-652; Lawrence 2002: 687-702). Nevertheless Malina’s model of honor and shame seems to have prevailed: “Bruce Malina developed a model of honor and shame that, while criticized, has stood the test of time.” (Crooks 2009: 592).

### 2.2.1 Malina’s model of honor and shame

In his model on honor and shame, Malina compares honor to wealth, meaning that it can be “ascribed” or “acquired”. Ascribed honor normally comes as default, that which you get by birth or for just being you<sup>8</sup> while acquired honor is something that a person has to work at and out do others in order to obtain it<sup>9</sup> (Malina 1993: 33-34). Malina claims that honor is acquired through challenge and response which he describes as a “social game” wherein people play according to socially defined rules in order to gain honor which forms part of limited good<sup>10</sup> so if someone gain somebody else is losing it.

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<sup>8</sup> Malina explains that like ascribed wealth, ascribed honor is honor that one gets without doing anything to acquire it, often birth status or class determines this kind of honor.

<sup>9</sup> “Acquired honor, on the other hand, is the socially recognized claim to worth that a person acquires by excelling over others in the social interaction that we shall call challenge and response” (Malina 1993: 34).

<sup>10</sup> “Limited good is a social construct, that is, product of human imagination and reasoning, which views the world as a zero-sum game... ancient peasants perceived themselves as subject to “nature,” not its master...the ancients believed “there is no more where this came from” (Neyrey 2000: 122-126).

According to Malina's model there are three aspects to the challenge–response process with regards to acquiring honor:

- (1) The challenger instigates the challenge in word, deed or both.
- (2) The individual to whom the challenge is directed and the public at large perception of the challenge.
- (3) The reaction of the one whom the challenge is directed at and the public's evaluation of the response.

Malina further points out that both the challenger and the receiver are males<sup>11</sup> in a patriarchal society like the first century Mediterranean although challengers may sometimes direct action at a female in order to challenge a receiver. Furthermore, this challenge and response can only be fair if it takes place between social equals. Thus for a person of a higher social status to challenge a person with a lower status might seem unfair and the public normally would be the judge of the fairness of the nature of the challenge. "... in the first–century Mediterranean world, every social interaction that takes place outside one's family or one's circle of friends is perceived as a challenge to honor, a mutual attempt to acquire honor from one's social equal... anthropologists call it an agonistic culture" (Malina 1993: 35-37).

Although the properties of honor and shame stay the same, the scene changes between "natural groupings" and "elective groupings" the difference between the two scenes is that the focus changes from blood and family relations in the "natural grouping" to position and function in the elective groupings which normally operates outside of the family boundaries. In both groupings the heads of the groups give the lead and embody the honor of the group (Malina 1993: 55; see also Moxnes 1996: 27-28, 34-37; cf Eickelman 1981: 88).

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<sup>11</sup> Honor however has a close connection with female sexuality though male action. "Throughout the Mediterranean area, male honor derives from the struggle to maintain intact the shame of kinswomen; and this renders male reputation insecurely dependent upon female sexual conduct ... In a sense, then, one may regard Mediterranean moral attributes as functionally linked to a particular kinetic notion of social sexuality. Sexuality itself is perceived through a competitive idiom by which men jockey for control over women as objects to achieve narcissistic gratifications and dominance over other men. Sexuality is a form of social power" (Gilmore 1987: 4).

In close relation to honor and shame is another core dependency form of relations involving an exchange of goods or some sort of 'product' like: land and protection for services. This form of reciprocal relation is known as a patronage and clientage relationship.

## 2.3 PATRONAGE AND CLIENTAGE

"The patron-client relationship is a social, institutional arrangement by means of which economic, political, or religious institutional relationships are outfitted with an overarching quality of kinship or family feeling" (Malina 2000: 151).

Compare this in relation to what Heen suggests about the relational aspects of patronage:

"Relationships between equals were very rare; rights were anything but unalienable. More common were reciprocal relations of individuals of unequal rank (and of unequal status before the law) in which one individual was clearly perceived as dominant, the other subordinate" (Heen 2006: 448).

### 2.3.1 Characteristics of patron-client relationships in the ancient Mediterranean

Whereas the honor and shame relations outside of the family boundaries figured prominently in the interaction between social equals, the patron-client relations are operative between different social classes "The institution involves issues of unequal power relations, pyramids of power... and the various strands that link this institution to the social system at large" (Elliot 1996: 148). Erik Heen in his article *Radical Patronage in Luke-Acts* claims that the master-slave relationship is the archetypical expression of Ancient Mediterranean Patronage although it also found expression in the husband (patron) – wife (client) relationships of the time (Heen 2006: 448).

The patron could give the client something in return for some service. The patron's influence and status and wealth could afford a client food, security, financial aid, citizenship, freedom from slavery or taxation, shelter, property, and the list can go on. It basically depended on where the patron finds him or herself on the social

ladder as to what “goods” the client could expect. For their part of the exchange in patronage the client remained under the power of and authority of the patron. The patronage-clientage relationship had a strong element of personal honor attached to it, and the ‘contract’ between the two voluntary parties was informed by values of friendship, loyalty, and fidelity (Elliot 1996: 148-149). Malina argues that patronage takes its values from the social institution of kinship which thrived on commitment, solidarity, and loyalty<sup>12</sup> (Malina 1996: 146).

Heen points out that these phenomena of patron – client relations were based on and spread throughout the Roman Empire with the Emperor at the apex of the pyramid and the elite of the society mirroring the role of the Emperor in their own dominions. Even the household in the empire contained elements of patronage where the head of the family or the *pater familias* would take on the role of the Emperor. He further notes that with the Emperor, and the elite class, violence was often used as motivation for the status quo of the patron-client relationship “...though the public rhetoric that supported this system projected an ideology of patrons working benevolently on behalf of their clients” (Heen 2006: 449).

### 2.3.2 Roman patronage and clientage

Whilst the system of patron-client relations were wide spread throughout the Mediterranean, the Roman version of this system seemed to be emulated where the Empire had presence or conquered other peoples. Malina and Rohrbaugh points out in their book *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* that the Roman system of patronage from its very beginnings had conquered people as clients who were viewed as inferior to citizens. However the mutual obligations between the two parties were seen as sacred and patrons and clients competed for each other (patrons for the honor of having more clients and clients for the benefits procured by having honourable patrons) for the means of economic or political control or advantage. Patronage in the Roman system was very often complemented by a host

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<sup>12</sup> Malina argues that patron-client relations is extension of kinship values through economic, political and religious arrangements. “What patron-client relations essentially entail is endowing and outfitting economic, political or religious institutional arrangements with an overarching quality of kinship...and since the hallmark of kinship as social institution is the quality of commitment, solidarity or loyalty realized in terms of generalized reciprocity, patron-client relations take on these kinship dimensions” (Malina 1996: 146).

- guest relation called *hospitium*. The *hospitium* was a binding agreement between social equals with the aim of mutual protection and could be extended from generation to generation with resulting friendship<sup>13</sup> (“contractual friendship”) (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992: 326-328). Besides the patron/host and client/guest there was often a third party catalyst involved in establishing the relational bonds. These catalysts can be called the brokers<sup>14</sup>.

## 2.4 SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Thus far it would seem that first century Mediterranean people were or should have been very mindful of the way other people saw them. The ever present public opinion and social systems as described above limited the person’s own intellectual and psychological properties, or so it would seem for the twenty first century personality obsessed with individualism. A closer investigation of the first century personality (as the work of Malina asserts) shows that the first century Mediterranean personality had a group orientated conscience based on social constructs such as basic values and ideologies described thus far in this paper. “Instead of individualism, what we find in the first – century Mediterranean world is what might be called a string [implying the complex interrelated features of] group orientation. Persons always considered themselves in terms of the group(s) in which they experienced themselves as inextricably embedded. We might describe such a psychological orientation as “dyadism”...dyadic personality is one who simply needs another continually in order to know who he or she really is” (Malina 1993: 67 see also Neyrey 2000: 94-98).

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<sup>13</sup> The role of the patron in both the patron-client/host-guest relationships were of fundamental importance for the local economy and political reality in the Roman Empire. “Patrons were powerful individuals who controlled resources and were expected to use their positions to hand out favors to inferiors based on “friendship,” personal knowledge, and favoritism. Benefactor patrons were expected to generously support city, village, or client. The Roman emperor related to major public officials this way...A pervasive social network of patron-client relations thus arose in which connections meant everything. Having few connections was shameful.” (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992: 328).

<sup>14</sup> “Brokers mediated between patrons above and clients below. First-order resources-land, jobs, goods, funds, power- were all controlled by patrons. Second-order resources- strategic contact with or access to patrons- were controlled by brokers who mediated the goods and services a patron had to offer. City officials served as brokers of imperial resources. Holy men or prophets could also act as brokers on occasion.” (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992: 328).

### 2.4.1 Malina's model of ancient Mediterranean human beings

Malina proposes a “three - zone” model based on the work of Bernard de Geradon. Malina admits that there is no unilateral model of human make in the ancient Mediterranean as different cultures have different approaches as to how they view human beings. Thus for example one finds that the Greco-Roman dualistic view of human make-up, namely the body and soul/ virtues and vices, is absent from other cultures of the Mediterranean of the first century and notably so in biblical writings related to the said time and space (Malina 1993: 73). The concept that one finds in biblical writings, relating to human makeup, is related to how human beings interact with the world. According to Malina and his three-zone model of human makeup “... the way human beings are perceived as fitting into their rightful place in their environments, physical and social, and acting in a way that is typically human, is by means of their inmost reactions (eyes-heart) as expressed in language (mouth-ears) or outwardly realized in activity (hands-feet), or both” (Malina 1993: 74). He articulates the three zones as emotion-fused thought, self-expressive speech, and purposeful action<sup>15</sup>. There is no certainty if the people of the first century were explicitly aware of this model and its ordering, according to Malina, yet it seems that they also applied this concept to the way they viewed God and God's dealings with them. “This cultural model of human makeup is applied analogically to God. God too gets described in terms of these three zones. In the New Testament, due to the central significance of the experience of Jesus, the three zones of the God-model are further refined in terms of specific activity ascribed to the Father, the Son and the Spirit” (Malina 1993: 82).

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<sup>15</sup> “Zone of emotion-fused thought. Eyes, heart ... and the activities of these organs: to see, know understand, think, remember... intelligence, mind, wisdom ...Zone of self-expressive speech. Mouth, ears, tongue...and the activities of these organs: to speak, hear, say, call, cry, question, sing, recount, tell, instruct, praise, listen, to blame, curse, swear, disobey, turn a deaf ear to. The following nouns and adjectives pertain to this zone as well: speech, voice..., song sound hearing, eloquent, dumb, talkative, silent, attentive, distracted and the like...Zone of purposeful action. Hands, feet, fingers, legs and the activities of these organs: to do, act, accomplish, execute, intervene, touch, come, go, march, walk, stand, sit, along with specific activities such as steal, kidnap, commit adultery, build and the like. The following representative nouns and adjectives pertain to this zone: action, gesture, work, activity, behaviour, step, walking, way, course, and any specific activity; active, capable, quick, slow, and so forth” (Malina 1993: 74-75).

## 2.5 ECONOMIC VALUES

It is inevitable that when one talks about values, one would tend to look at economic values seeing that in modern and post modern societies, economic rudiments seem to overshadow most other values. The economy of pre-industrial societies was not based on markets as in our societies today. The market was a mere fraction of ancient economies such as the first century Mediterranean “The ancient economy was also embedded in (subordinate to) other social institutions, notably political and kin institutions. The Greek words behind the term ‘economy,’ in fact, mean ‘household’ [oikos] management [nomia].” (Oakman 1996: 128). However this does not mean that market economy is a modern phenomenon. The ancient Mediterranean did in fact have some sort of market economy operating in specific areas... “Market exchange in antiquity was limited to some special cases, usually monopolised by specific groups (Phoenicians<sup>16</sup> on the eastern Mediterranean, Nabataens in Arabia), and benefited only the most powerful elements of society” (Oakman 1996: 129). So what then was the basis of common ancient economies such as operative in the first century Mediterranean?

Karl Polanyi suggests in his book *The Great Transformation* (1994) that alternatives to market economies existed. These alternatives had reciprocity and redistribution as its basis... “The two dominant forms of economic exchange in antiquity were reciprocity within kinship relations and redistribution in political economies...” (Oakman 1996: 129)<sup>17</sup>. This understanding of the economy is grafted and rooted on

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<sup>16</sup> “Historical notices in the Hebrew Bible seem to speak of a maritime partnership between Tyrian Phoenicia and early Israel, according to which Hiram and Solomon commissioned one joint merchant fleet on the Red Sea which sailed to the destination port of Ophir (1 Kgs 9:26-28; 10:11-12; 2 Chr 8:17-18; 9:10-11) and another fleet on the Mediterranean Sea which travelled as far as Tarshish (1 Kgs 10:22; 2 Chr 9:21). The text indicates that the Red Sea operation, whatever its nature, focused almost exclusively on exploiting the gold resources of Ophir (located either in East Africa or in the south-western Arabian Peninsula...), while, by contrast, it appears the royal fleet... on the Mediterranean would return from Tarshish with more varied cargoes ... how many times or with what frequency the vessels may have plied the Red Sea we are not told, but both the Deuteronomist and the Chronicler indicate that voyages to Tarshish would return every three years (1 Kgs 10:22b; 2 Chr 9:21b).” (Beitzel 2010: 37).

<sup>17</sup> Oakman further points out that it is critical to understand both of these factors of the ancient economy “Reciprocity means exchange on a gift or barter basis. It is characterized by informal dyadic contracts-social give-and-take-within the household and village. A gift accepted implies an obligation owed...reciprocity ensures not only that goods on the average will be equitably distributed, but also that help will be available in hard times. By contrast, redistribution was characteristically observed in the institutions of state and religious taxation. It involved the politically or religiously induced extraction of a percentage of local production, the

the ancient perception of limited good, benefitting the elite minority of the time and keeping the majority of 98% in their economic turmoil of lower class status.

“Their lot was an unquestioned, if uneasy, acceptance of dominance by some supreme and remote power, with little control over conditions that governed their lives. This means that for most part... people would see their existence as determined and limited by the natural and social resources of their village,... city... and world... such socially limited and determined existence could be verified and by experience and lead to the perception that all goods available to a person are, in fact, limited” (Malina 1993: 94-95).

This means that the economic reality of the first century Mediterranean peasant was a limited economy, restricting movement in the social strata and preventing riches for all. An economy governed by values such as limited good made it an honourable thing to avoid market economies and those kinds that characterize the economies of industrialized cities<sup>18</sup>. The value of the people living with such a world view was measured in honor and shame and not market value. The economy thus was an extension of core values of the societies in the Mediterranean.

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store housing of that product, and its eventual redistribution for some political and or another” (Oakman 1996: 129).

<sup>18</sup> “Since all good exists in limited amounts which cannot be increased or expanded, it follows that individuals, alone or with their family, can improve their social position only at the expense of others. Hence any apparent relative improvement in someone’s position with respect to any good in life is viewed as a threat to the entire community. Obviously, someone is being deprived and denied something that is theirs, whether they know it or not. And since there is often uncertainty as to who is losing-it may be me and my family-any significant improvement is perceived not simply as a threat to other individuals or families alone, but as a threat to all individuals and families within the community, be it village or city quarter” (Malina 1993: 95).



## 2.6 SUMMARY

The core values of the first century Mediterranean have to be read and understood by outsiders, or modern readers as values operating in pre-industrialized cities where people lived in accordance to their understanding of the world and its resources. All good(s) were limited and could not be increased. Thus all people had to live in such a fashion that would be of benefit to the whole community. To gain more good meant that someone else would lose it, and therefore it would be shameful for a person or family to do so. The honourable thing in such a society is for people to preserve their 'natural' status into which they were born. All values of the time (arguably) were subjugated by honor and shame. Every action had to be measured to the honor that can be gained or lost from it for even honor was limited.

Such a society made it very difficult for individualistic expression and therefore one finds that the individual's thoughts, actions and needs were always second to that of the group (*pro bono familia* was the *modus operandi* for the family or household which was the basic unit of the whole system and Roman Empire). Individuals were a mere part of the group and the group, whether family or institutions or organisation, was where the honor and shame gathered. Relationships were the key to honor in this kind of societies, and the lack thereof caused shame. Thus the institution of patronage played a major role in the day to day makeup of the Mediterranean world in the first century. Patronage was a way of negotiating the political and economic realities of the day, and was to benefit of both patron and client.

The economy was based on the values of society so one finds traces of honor and shame in the economy but ultimately the basis of the non-market economy of the time was the concept of limited good which was also a method of enforcing the status quo.

In the following two chapters we will explore how these socio-historic elements impacted on the biblical texts of Luke 1:46-56 and 4:16-30 and how our interpretation of the text gets influenced by the social values of a place like the Mediterranean in the first century.

## CHAPTER THREE

### SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC AND FEMINIST INSIGHTS ON LUKE 1:46-56

#### 3.1 MOVING TOWARDS A SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC READING OF LUKE 1: 46-56.

In the previous chapter we have explored some of the core values of ancient Mediterranean societies. It has been argued that the ideologies (as world view) and values of the ancient Mediterranean form the basis for all interaction within that society and escalate into a belief system. Upon discovering this (that world view and values are the foundation for societies, also the ancient Mediterranean) the interrelated web, of which documents like the Bible form a part, became more apparent and this led to the assertion that various different levels of functionality of these and similar documents are at work simultaneously for example: socio-economic, socio-historic, political, theological, and so forth.

The purpose of this chapter and the next is to identify the ideologies and values as found in the pericopes that will be dealt with, and the exegetical importance of these world views of the ancient Mediterranean world. This chapter will also begin to explore the implications of the proposed reading of the selected texts based on hermeneutics of the social sciences and that of feminist theology.

##### 3.1.1 Demarcation of pericope(s)

When determining the boundaries of a pericope one should keep in mind that the boundaries are very often set by personal choice, presuppositions or predetermined building blocks such as chapter divisions, and lectionary guidelines. Luke's structure<sup>19</sup> is similar to that of Mark and Matthew. Luke places emphasis on the birth account (like Matthew) and gives more depth to the final journey to Jerusalem. The

<sup>19</sup> One can divide the gospel of Luke into the following parts:

1:1-4 Preface

1:5-2:52 The Births of John and Jesus

3:1-4:13 John and Jesus sharing the ministry

4:14-9:50 Jesus' ministry in Galilee

9:51-19:10 The Journey to Jerusalem

19:11-21:38 Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem

22:1-24:53 Jesus' death and resurrection

pericopes (Luke 1:46-56 and 4:16-30) chosen for this study form part of respectively the second part (1:5-2:52 the birth of the “prophets”) and the fourth part (4:14-9:50 the function of Jesus and the factions caused there by) of the main division of the book.

These pericopes are essential not only to comprehend the method of interpretation deployed in this study, but also because they form part of strategic building blocks in Luke’s portrayal of the whole Jesus event. Thus for example the second part of the main division of Luke’s gospel, of which 1:46-56 forms part, contains much more vivid information in comparison with Matthew’s rendering of the Jesus event before the public ministry of Jesus, and without reading too much into the prominent place of Mary and Elizabeth in this section of the book, one also has to at least consider the intention and effect of their presence seeing that other gospels have a different intent, which does not require their explicit appearance as Luke has them.

I have chosen to work with the pericope division of Malina and Rohrbaugh as indicated in their book *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* where they give the reader an outline of reading scenarios in the synoptic gospels (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992: 279-283). The reason for opting to go with the foresaid scholars’ work is because it gives a clear indication and implementation of the social sciences as an interpretive tool in exegesis, which together with feminist hermeneutics is the crux of this chapter. As for the selected pericopes that this study will concentrate on, Malina and Rohrbaugh suggest that one should read 1:39-56 as a unit instead of 1:46-56 and 4:16-30 (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992: 279; 280).

## 3.2 MOVING TOWARDS A SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC READING OF LUKE 1:39-56

### 3.2.1 Mary's journey and kinship

From the outset of this pericope, one would have to pay attention to the importance of kinship. Mary's urge μετὰ σπουδῆς (1:39)<sup>20</sup> to get to her relative might indicate some form of excitement on her side, and need to share her good news as with someone appreciative of her condition. However one also has to keep in mind that it might have been out of fear that she had to make this hasty journey. Ἀναστᾶσα (1:39) referring to the close proximity of the time of Gabriel's visit (v26) and Luke's absence of Joseph<sup>21</sup> in the story up to now can imply that Mary had to hasten to her relative Elizabeth in order to escape the harsh reality of social values such as shame and bringing shame upon her closest relatives.

The absence of Joseph in this pericope and the occurrence of Zechariah becoming mute σιωπῶν (1:20) might allude to this sense of shame. It was always the role of the male to speak in public and eloquence was regarded as a male asset (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992: 284). Thus it would already dishonour the men in relations to these women (Mary and Elizabeth) if they were not aware of and could not speak about these miraculous conceptions. For Luke to render his account of the annunciations of both the birth of John and Jesus without male voices in the foreground was to counter the norms of honor-shame societies.

Mary being engaged ἐμνηστευμένην<sup>22</sup> to Joseph (v.27) would have been regarded as his wife<sup>23</sup> and thus would have been embedded in the family relations of her betrothed. Having a child which is not her betrothed's would have placed her in disrepute in an already unbalanced relationship, because the wife would remain on the border of her husband's family until she gave birth to her first son. Marriage was

<sup>20</sup> σπουδῆς could mean to be in a hurry or to haste but it can also imply the sense of being read or eager or imply devotion. However in the context of the text it would imply hastening or anxious moving towards.

<sup>21</sup> As opposed to Matthew who brings Joseph in on board with the angle of the Lord appearing to him and working through his dream as guide for incarnation of Christ.

<sup>22</sup> In antiquity being betrothed was a binding relationship thus breaking it would have been the equivalent of divorce since "Betrothal sealed the contract" (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992: 287).

<sup>23</sup> Women were part of their paternal family until betrothal would remove her from her paternal household and move her to her husband's household after the wedding ceremony where she would remain an "outsider" until the birth of her first son who would then be her biggest asset because she then have a "blood" relation to the family (Ibid).

a fusion of two extended families which further would have had economic implications. For instance families would negotiate marriage to advance their means of survival. Cas Wepener points out that life in first century Mediterranean world was characterised by extreme poverty:

“Die mense was uiters arm en net die heel rykste mense, van wie daar min was, was grondbesitters. Mense se ekonomiese oorlewing het meestal afgehang van verbintenisse... Sonder ‘n ondersteuningsgroep sou ‘n persoon ‘n baie skraal kans op oorlewing- materieël en geestelik- gehad het.” (Wepener 2010: 101).

Families used defensive strategies to prevent loss of members to another family thus the loss of a family member, through marriage, required compensation in the form of a bride-price (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992: 290). In the light of the norms and values of kinship Mary would have caused her family the loss of the bride-price which would have been shameful in terms of family relations as well as economic implications.

From the perspective of this study it is interesting to note that verse 39 does not mention anything about Mary having a companion on her journey to the hill country. It would have been viewed as abnormal behaviour for anyone to travel for any other reason but the customary even more so a woman travelling by herself. Besides the possibility of escaping the scandal of her pregnancy and the fury of both families, this improper behaviour of Mary also indicates something about the defiance of the first century psychological orientation. As pointed out in chapter 2 of this study the people of the first century Mediterranean were considered group orientated people with dyadic personalities. The individual would measure his or her worth against what people said and thought about them. Mary puts her life at risk by travelling, but it seems that she considers the son that she is carrying to be capable of protecting her against evil (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992: 291). Luke confirms this notion in verse 41 as the fetus of Elizabeth leaped in her ἐσκήρτησεν τὸ βρέφος<sup>24</sup> when Mary greeted

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<sup>24</sup> This is a prenatal sign which was known in the Scriptures of Israel as for instance can be seen in Gen. 25:22 with Jacob and Esau in the womb of Rebekah and Perez and Zerah in the womb of Tamar Gen. 38:27-30. ἐσκήρτησεν thus does not automatically imply joy as in the case of the fetus of Elizabeth. Louw and Nida points out the following: “Though it may seem quite natural to speak of ‘leaping for joy,’ in some cultures this would not be a meaningful combination of words, for leaping might suggest anger, ritual exorcism (driving out demons), or preparation for war. It may, therefore, be necessary in some languages to translate ‘jump for joy’ merely as ‘be exceedingly glad.’ It may be particularly awkward to speak of a fetus jumping in the womb, for

her. This perception of unborn children with religious importance is an idea already prevalent in the Old Testament especially amongst the prophets (see Jer. 1:5; Isa. 49:1).

### 3.2.2 “Womb-talk” and public/private worlds

It would have been highly improper to talk about matters of the womb in public. Women were to keep womb talk very private as the women’s body would have been in close relations to what could shame the honor of the family in a patriarchal society:

“...a women’s honor was determined first by her virginity and secondly by her loyalty to her husband” (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992: 348).

Luke writing the dialogue between Mary and her kinswoman Elizabeth enters into the restrictive private world of the society in which the text emerged. This dialogue is however inspired by the Holy Spirit who enables Elizabeth to exclaim the blessedness of the fruit of Mary’s womb (v.42).

The boundaries between public world and private world are closely linked with the properties of honor and shame. What was honourable and virtuous were allowed to be brought to the public arena and potential shameful elements were meant to be kept in the private sphere. Elizabeth’s act of singing the praise of Mary as the mother of the Lord is a fulfilment of what was promised to Zechariah (v.15). She was filled with the Holy Spirit<sup>25</sup> at that moment; which act she did not do in private as one would expect a woman of her time to do; she ἀνεφώνησεν, meaning that she did it in a loud voice<sup>26</sup> and in doing so she caused shame on her husband and family and one might argue dishonoured the social order as well as the government.

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obviously it would simply be a rapid movement of the limbs and not actual change of location” (Louw & Nida 1989).

<sup>25</sup> John (as fetus) and Elizabeth were filled with the Holy Spirit at the ‘sight’ of Jesus (as fetus) and his mother. Thus they are the first to realise the importance of the Messiah in the gospel of Luke and thereby the angel of the Lord’s promise, that John will be fulfilled with the Holy Spirit, to Zechariah came to pass in the act of Elizabeth filled with the Holy Spirit with her child in her womb.

<sup>26</sup> From a practical perspective one might conclude that Elizabeth had some sort of prenatal pain after the baby in her womb leaped.

In the patriarchal society, that the first century Mediterranean was, men and women were divided by spaces, expectations and roles. Whereas the public world was the domain of men, women were restricted to the private world of the domestic realm which included responsibilities of rearing children, housekeeping and clothing. Women were to be seen primarily in the company of women and thus relied on other women for companionship. Chastity, silence, obedience, and loyalty to her husband or her father if she was not married would have been the primary virtues of an honourable woman. Any contrary actions or behaviour or a breach of these expectations, roles and spaces would not have been tolerated in the societies of the day, and in fact would have publicly shamed all members of the family and especially the men representing the family (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992: 348-349).

### 3.2.3 Mary's song of praise and oral poetry

Mary's song of praise closely resembles the song of Hannah in 1 Sam. 2:1-10 and also features various themes of the psalms especially Psalms 34:1-4, 10-11; 89:1-2, 51-52, and 107:9. The relation between Hannah's song and Mary's song also highlights to us something of the various differences between the public and the private world and the different social roles of men and women. In the first century world of our discussion the populous did not have the privilege to be able to read. Thus the oral tradition were much more than the recital of prose as we find it in Western societies today. Oral poetry was a means of keeping the tradition alive.

However the poetry of men and women differed according to their social roles and has close relations to the public and private worlds of the first century. The public domain was the realm of men and therefore official and ritual recitals of poetry on ceremonial occasions were reserved for males. The "Benedictus" of Luke (his hymn of praise) 1:68-76 is a good example of the structure of public poetry. Public poetry was often a combination of phrases from well known scriptures and therefore the speaker would have had a good knowledge of both scripture and tradition. Female poetry on the other hand would have been more subdued and informal and very spontaneous (as is the case in this text). It also would have expressed the deeply felt emotions and forbidden or private subject matter (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992: 293-294).

Mary's song of praise has as motive the forbidden subject of conception. That would have offended any person outside the circle of women's groups; however the text indicates the very deep emotions that Mary experienced at the time of the exclamation<sup>27</sup>.

### 3.2.4 Mary's song and patronage

In chapter 2 we demonstrated some of the properties of patronage of the ancient Mediterranean. Chief of whom one might argue is the unequal power relations. Furthermore the values of patronage were linked to the social system at large, especially the Emperor–subject relation and that of husband–wife (patron-client) relation. Mary's song of praise is a pointed case of the values that existed in the patron-client system of the time. Here Mary takes on the role of client and God the role of patron. Mary's declaration of τῷ θεῷ τῷ σωτῆρί μου falls well within the boundaries of what a patron's role would have been with the omission of a vital element that patronage thrived on namely: violence.

Erik Heen points out that although the public image of the patronage system was that of patrons working 'benevolently on behalf of their clients', there was an ever present sense of the elite manipulating their power to violently impose their dominance on their subjects. He uses a modern analogy of the '*mafia*' and the role and dominance of the '*Don*' to give a sense how violence has operated in the system of patronage (Heen 2006: 449). The absence of violence in the patronage of God is further amplified in the unworthiness of the client. Mary's state of affliction ταπεινῶσιν gets unmerited attention ἐπέβλεψεν<sup>28</sup> (1:48) from God. God has looked with favour, meaning taken special interest in her afflicted state, normally this special interest is begged for (as is the case in Luke 9:38 διδάσκαλε, δέομαί σου ἐπιβλέψαι ἐπὶ τὸν υἱόν μου) but not so in Mary's case. Mary's state of affliction might imply a sense of shame; and shame that she brought upon her family, as ταπεινῶσις might also imply some form of humiliation. However keeping in mind the economic benefits

<sup>27</sup> Mary's address is meditation and expression of personal emotions and experience. Her utterance is more majestic than that of Elizabeth and surpasses that of Hannah in moral and spiritual character. She falls back on traditional Jewish scripture in her intense state of exultation (Driver and Plummer 1896: 30).

<sup>28</sup> Here the meaning exceeds a mere visual perception. It actually implies a sense of concern and special attention.



that patronage carried with it, it might be more plausible to interpret Mary's state of affliction as a reference to her low estate in the social make-up of the day. This is certainly the case in the verses that follow which indicates the economic and honourable properties of patronage.

### 3.2.5 Economic benefits of patronage in Mary's song of praise

Mary's confidence that generations will call her blessed μακαριοῦσίν is not only a radical reversal of her afflicted state that she found herself in, but it also carries undertones of beneficial circumstances. All elements of good and beneficial living were in general associated with the elite, and therefore patrons of the Mediterranean world. Therefore blessedness implies honourable living and circumstances which Mary claims for her through the work of God in her. Heen points out the difference between the shameful poor and the honourable rich as follows:

"Because of material deprivation, poor diet, dangerous occupations, and the crowded conditions in which many urban poor lived, they were susceptible to sickness and disfigurement in ways the elite were not" (Heen 2006: 452) .

Mary's state of affliction (should it refer to her childlessness) would have had economic implications seeing that a woman depended on her male relatives for economic stability. Therefore the very personal tone in her praise to God, calling God her Savior σωτήρι μου, her blessedness μακαριοῦσίν με , and God doing great things for her ὅτι ἐποίησέν μοι μεγάλα ὁ δυνατός, can be interpreted as her sense of economic security in the knowledge that she is carrying a son. So God's saving intervention is more than a religious act of salvation. By giving her a son, God secures her a future in a society that places much emphasis on male children as breadwinners.

The promise that the angel Gabriel makes to Mary in verses 31-33 would mean that the Son that Mary is carrying at this stage would become the ultimate patron who would mediate the resources of God to many people as opposed to imperial resources or that of the elite of the time. Mary would have viewed this promise as one which partly contained a warranty of economic constancy for many people besides herself. Malina and Rohrbaugh give us a contrasting outline of the

patronage hierarchy between that of Rome and what Luke advocates for in his gospel:

Patronage	Rome	Luke
Patron	Caesar	God
Broker	Elites	Jesus
Client	Citizens	Supplicants
Benefit	Good	Good

(Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992: 329).

### 3.2.6 Mary's song of praise and honor and shame

Mary's song of praise contains a very strong element of honor and shame. Verses 51-53 contain the strongest properties of honor and shame. The ascribed honor of the ὑπερηφάνους<sup>29</sup> (the arrogant or haughty) are challenged here and put to shame. The verb Ἐποίησεν implying a highly generic type of activity (Louw & Nida 1989) is the same verb that we find in verse 49 where Mary exclaims that "the mighty one did great things" for her. Thus one can read this shaming of the arrogant as shaming the personal adversaries of Mary because of the intimate tone in verse 49. Thus Mary acquires honor through the work of God in her life. As we indicate in chapter 2 maintaining honor was a very public activity, and although Mary probably would have spoken these words in private the effects of her proclamation probably had public

<sup>29</sup> John Nolland suggests that ὑπερηφάνους refers to those who do not believe in God and that they are neither hungry nor afflicted confident in their own achievements with no need of God. Thus the scattering in the thought of their heart διανοία καρδίας αὐτῶν implies a disturbance in the being of those deeply orientated in the self (Nolland 1989: 71-72).

implications. Furthermore, having God as her patron her honor was preordained not to be challenged by those who would have wished to shame her.

### 3.2.7 Limited good and honor and shame in Mary's song of praise

Just as all resources of the time honor was limited good, and those who had it have viewed and protected it as physical property. Honor was balanced as in scale fashion. Those who do have honor gained it at the cost of someone losing it. This understanding of the flow of honor resulted in the phenomenon that honor was disputed:

“Claims to more than one's appointed share of honor, indicated at birth, threatened other and would eventually trigger attempts to cut the claimant down to size” (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992: 309).

Mary's song of praise thus potentially placed her in danger of being cut 'down to size' through public challenges on her honor. This would further imply that the males of her family would have to stand in the line of fire in defending her honor and that of the family. For a woman to make such bold statements and challenging the status quo of the elite ( the arrogant, powerful and the rich) meant serious trouble for the whole family, and could impede the honor of her betrothed, and further could invoke internal family discipline. However Mary's trust in God seems to surpass fear of customs and tradition as well as social exclusion.

In terms of honor and the reversal of honor,<sup>30</sup> from those who would normally have to those who do not have, verse 53 would be the premium description. πλουτοῦντας the rich, those who have considerably more than the average person, would be able, through the virtue of their possessions, to defend their honor in such a way that it would benefit them not only economically but also with social capital ( for example acquiring more public honor, through patronage). For them to be send away empty

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<sup>30</sup> The reversal taking place between the rich and the poor the lowly and the mighty can be described in terms of honor and shame. The status quo of the society is turned upside down in Mary's magnificat. The theme of reversal of fortune is not uncommon in literature of the ancient Mediterranean. It is also a common occurrence in the OT. In agrarian societies to be rich, does not solely refer to economic abundance, although economics and political are included in the understanding of being rich. To be rich meant to be able to defend one's honor and one's position in society. To be poor meant to be vulnerable and exposed to attack and loss (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992: 291).

ἐξαπέστειλεν κενούς by God, Mary's patron in whom she trust beyond normal measure, meant that they would have been unable to defend their honourable position in society. Moreover those who normally would be unable to obtain honor through public display are satisfied by God which meant, in the understanding of the day, that their honor (that of the rich) flowed to the poor. This is an understanding that one will find throughout the gospel of Luke and especially in the ministry of Jesus.

### **3.2.8 God's promise to the forefathers in relation to Mary's social circumstances**

The last two verses Mary's song takes a more general tone as opposed to the personal reflection on her experience in the previous verses. A literal translation of verse 54a would be: "he has helped his Son Israel". The author's intention might be to show that in Jesus God would extend the promise to Abraham beyond the limits of Israel (cf Luke 24:47-49). However this study will keep to the translation of παιδός as servant and not son. In this light it is interesting to note that in the Old Testament where Israel gets referred to as servant and God's intervention is promised, it often implies difficult circumstances. For example we find in Jeremiah 46: 27-28 that Israel finds itself in exile. Thus for the purpose of this study, we regard ἀντελάβετο as: to assist with what is needed (came to the help of). Therefore one might conclude that Mary's need of social security is met through giving birth to a son, who in turn will provide to not only her spiritual deliverance but also her material and social needs. She thus uses the familiar OT oral poetry to describe her own situation. In Genesis 17:19, God promises to Abraham a son. This promise of a son had the same prosperous effect as the effect Mary anticipated.

### 3.3 Luke 1: 39-56 IN THE LIGHT OF FEMINIST INTERPRETATION

Part of this study is to read the pericopes of this study through the lenses of feminist hermeneutics. It is a well known fact that feminist theology seeks to explore the world view, experience and questions of women in a male dominated world and societies. Furthermore it tries to get across the understanding that women are equally God-like as their male counterparts and that the female experience is just as valid in biblical interpretation as that of the androcentric dominated scholarship.

In this part of the study I will deploy the properties of feminist hermeneutics as a supplement to that of the social sciences to move towards a reading of Luke 1:39-56 that might be beneficial for Christians in impoverished communities reading the Bible as source of inspiration. For the purpose of this study, I will make use of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's four dimensional<sup>31</sup> hermeneutical model for reading the Bible in a feminist critical fashion.

#### 3.3.1 Schüssler Fiorenza's four-dimensional approach to biblical texts:

She suggests that in order to find the silent voices and experience of women in Biblical texts, one has to read with the hermeneutics of suspicion, remembrance, proclamation and actualization (Schüssler Fiorenza 1986: 23-24). A hermeneutic of suspicion analyse and points out androcentric and patriarchal biases of biblical writers and interpreters alike, whilst a hermeneutic of remembrance seeks to reconstruct biblical history as that of women and men and not exclusively from the perspective of male dominance. A hermeneutic of proclamation insists that biblical texts cannot be read as oppressive texts in the light of the Bible being the word of God. It therefore critically evaluates the theological value of texts over against dominant interpretations. A hermeneutic of actualization creatively reflects on the experience of women that is not echoed in the mainstream interpretation of biblical texts (Schüssler Fiorenza 1986: 23-24).

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<sup>31</sup> In later works for instance *Sharing Her Word: Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Context* Schüssler Fiorenza expands her four-dimensional approach to biblical text to a sevenfold model. Here she adds a hermeneutics of experience that socially locates experience; a hermeneutics of dominance; and a hermeneutics of assessment and evaluation (Schüssler Fiorenza 1998: 76-77).

### *3.3.1.1 The hermeneutic of suspicion applied to Luke 1:39-56*

Feminist hermeneutics starts with the experience of women. In our pericope of Luke 1:39-56 the two women namely Mary and Elizabeth take the centre roles. However this does not mean that all elements of androcentric dominance are absent. The hermeneutic of suspicion would start by negotiating the patriarchal elements present in the text. On face value it seems that this text is a text of liberation for women due to the absence of men in the pericope. However, as pointed out earlier, this social reality implies underlining elements of oppression. In the honor and shame society in which these women lived the norms of the day are kept in place by things such as the language used in the text for example τὸν οἶκον Ζαχαρίου in verse 40 and μήτηρ τοῦ κυρίου in verse 43 are but some examples of androcentric language. Moreover the primary role ascribed to these women, and for which they are specially set apart in the Lucan story of Christ, reduce the worth of females to that of their ability of rearing children.

The hermeneutic of suspicion would also question the juxtaposed exclamation of Elizabeth (42-45) and that of Mary (46-55) as to what the author's intention was by doing so. Some traditional interpretations have highlighted a degree of hierarchy between the two with Mary's song of praise being the superior of the two in tone and tranquillity:

"It [Mary's song of praise] is more calm and majestic than the utterance of Elizabeth. The exultation is as great, but it is more under control" (Driver and Plummer 1896: 30).

It is interpretations like this and probable intentions of authors that perpetuate the male interest at the expense of women's experiences and history. The author's intention becomes clear later on in the gospel: that John becomes the forerunner of Christ (Luke 3) thus taking on a less significant role in the gospel story. Elizabeth thus becomes silent after this pericope and in fact so does Mary in order to allow the real centre character namely Jesus to take up his role. This in itself is not a problem for feminist interpreters. The problem comes when interpretations relegate the experience of both women in the text or oppose them in a dualistic fashion to serve

the purpose of exclusive applications of the text that might be oppressive and not liberating. The hermeneutic of suspicion would thus ask questions like 'who benefits from the interpretations made on a text like this'? And what type of questions and experience was brought to the text by the interpreters<sup>32</sup>?

From a feminist perspective it is also important to note that although the text, through the author's intention, places Mary in a more superior role in this pericope, she is vocal only in the presence of her kinswoman Elizabeth thus she is being confined to her role of woman. She is not being promoted to a public speaker in this pericope which is a clear indication of the male dominated androcentric society of her day. Who's benefitting from such a reading of this pericope? Focusing on the words of Mary, and interpreting it solely in the light of its theological and spiritual importance is an act of perpetuating the institution of male-stream interpretation and male dominance. The hermeneutic of suspicion should at the very least make us aware of these one-sided interpretations and can further help in exposing other detrimental elements in biblical interpretation.

### *3.3.1.2 The hermeneutic of remembrance applied to Luke 1:39-56*

The hermeneutic of remembrance seeks to eliminate the negative effects of androcentric readings which the hermeneutic of suspicion brings to the fore. Although Schüssler Fiorenza concedes that in the Luke-Acts corpus women are more prominent than in the other gospels or New Testament books, she also points out that in general exegetes put the story of women in Luke in the situation of the historical Jesus rather than in the situation of the early Christian communities to whom Luke writes. She further suggests that to make the distinction between the historical Jesus situation and that of the early church (that of the first century of Christianity), one would have to take into account the author's theological-pastoral intention. In other words we have to discover whether the author is focussing on the historical or the resurrected Jesus (Schüssler Fiorenza 1986: 29-30).

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<sup>32</sup> "To write women's history, to place women at the center, is to say that men are not at the center of reality, that what men do and are is not more important than what women do and are. It is still true, for both general and church history, that the topics chosen and the questions asked assume that men's activities and thoughts are more important than women's. The tendency to emphasize political and military history is based on this assumption...When the framework is structured in this way, it is not surprising to find the history of subsumed under such categories as 'the role of women or the status of women' (Brooten 1985: 82).

In the pericope of Luke 1:39-56 indicators of the author's interest can be found in his usage of words and phrases such as μήτηρ τοῦ κυρίου μου (v. 43) which indicates that the author appeals to the resurrected Christ and not the historical Jesus as focal point for the audience; ἐπέβλεψεν (v. 48) which appeals to the special interest God takes in the marginalised; and τῆς δούλης αὐτοῦ (v.48) which implies that Mary sees herself as a slave girl of God. The term slave often gets translated as, servant, which bears a close relation to the word deacon διάκονος which in the early church already became a technical term for a servant, and diakonia a term for a variety of services rendered by members of the early church (see Acts 6-8).

Despite the author's possible interest as shown above, the text remains a site of struggle for women in the world of the text. While Mary's song of praise is shown in the context of early Christian community as superior to that of Elizabeth; the harsh reality of the struggle of women of the time was still that they were restricted to the private world related to the female social role of women. Elizabeth who exclaimed with a loud cry ἀνεφώνησεν κραυγῇ μεγάλη v.42 is symbolically silenced by the more acceptable song of praise of Mary as it would fit the stereo-type of women of the time. For feminist critics it would be important to note that it is not God and the Lord that draws these distinctions between the two women but the male author implied here as Luke who writes from a certain point of view for a certain audience with a very specific understanding of gender roles and social values. The social sciences help us to pin point these stereo-types and gender roles and social values but it does not help us to 'enlighten' them so that it might give and not obliterate life<sup>33</sup>.

### *3.3.1.3 The hermeneutic of proclamation applied to Luke 1:39-56*

The hermeneutic of proclamation strives to announce the liberating character of the biblical text to which it is applied. However not all texts are liberating, some texts are oppressive because of the patriarchal and kyriarchal<sup>34</sup> elements written into them.

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<sup>33</sup> A feminist interpretation of the Bible does not begin with the text as the subject of interpretation or by placing the Bible at the center of the attention of the interpreter but rather with the experience of the interpreter and the socio-political and religious location of the person interpreting the text. In doing so the interpreter can critically analyse the not only the text but the kyriarchal oppressive structures and systems which shape our lives and those embedded in the biblical texts (Schüssler Fiorenza 1998: 77).

<sup>34</sup> Mary Ann Beavis suggest alternative images for the Divine and pays special attention to the avian imagery as metaphors found in the Bible and Jewish tradition. She points out that the image of God as a mother Hen



The hermeneutic of proclamation allows the interpreter to either proclaim the text as liberating and life giving, not only to women but also all marginalised groups of people and individuals, or state that it is oppressive and exclusive benefitting only certain groups of people. We therefore can “not afford to have such a patriarchal text divine authority and proclaim it as the word of God” (Schüssler Fiorenza 1986: 32). Failure to point out the oppressive side of texts in actual fact perpetuates the system of oppression not only on biblical characters but also on those who suffer today under systems of oppression. Some texts have both elements of liberation and oppression.

Luke 1:39-56 is one of those texts that have both elements present in the pericope. As we mentioned earlier there is a distinction drawn between the two women that implies that the one is more superior than the other, and that at the end of the day they are reduced to their sphere of the private world ‘where they belong’. Yet on the other hand one has to highlight and acknowledge that some of the statements made by Mary<sup>35</sup> and the very fact that the two women’s ‘private’ conversation and the very private matter of womb talk, take such a prominent role in this pericope amidst the social restriction of the time, are liberating elements that needs to be proclaimed. Here we find two women who resist the status quo and challenge the social standards. This is not only liberating for women of the time but can also stand for a point of reference by modern women and people trapped in the oppressive systems of poverty, classism, racism, economic exploitation and countless more systems that benefits a small percentage of people at the cost of others and in the name of keeping tradition, culture and customs alive and maintained.

#### *3.3.1.4 The hermeneutic of creative actualization applied to Luke 1:39-56*

The hermeneutic of creative actualization is occupied with the world behind the text and the interpretation of the text in such a way that it gives a feminist re-telling of the story of the wo/men in the text normally relegated and silenced. It gives a liberating sense of texts and seeks to abandon messages that silence, subordinates, devalues,

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stems from Jewish tradition where the hen or fowl “can symbolize divine love and care, fertility, atonement, concern for the poor, and perhaps even the eternity of the human soul” (Beavis 2003: 124).

<sup>35</sup> For example the reversal of the state of the lowly and the hungry in opposition to the powerful and the rich.

divides and alienates. In this way the dichotomy of the Bible actually comes to the fore. "...one the one hand, the Bible often contains very bad news for them [women], but it also contains much good news" (Rakoczy 2004: 192). This is true not only for women but also all people (wo/men) struggling with contemporary systems of oppression, who read the Bible at face value and find nothing liberating, no good news, in it.

In Luke 1:39-56, the hermeneutic of creative actualization would first of all publicize the struggle of the two women, the struggle against the social values of honor and shame, the struggle against the 'prescribed' roles of women and men and all the relating factors<sup>36</sup>. Therefore the interpreter needs to articulate what is not said in the text. For example voicing Mary's fear of shame because of the reality of honor-shame in her community and articulate the comfort she finds in her kinswomen Elizabeth sharing her experience of pregnancy. In addition one should also place much emphasis on how the fear is converted and face up to by both women's out of the 'normal' behaviour. One should use one's imagination to hear Elizabeth say: "Cousin welcome in my house make yourself at home" as opposed to the "where she entered the house of Zechariah..." (v. 42).

The hermeneutic of creative actualization enables us to lift "out of the distorted web of history" (Schüssler Fiorenza 1986: 34) the actions and influence of women like Elizabeth and Mary, actions like the prophecy that Elizabeth makes in verse 42-45, whilst it was not expected of women to do so. She also influences Mary to give her own testimonial and in doing so Mary overcomes her fear of 'scandal' to the point that she not only finds religious significance in her situation but also that she takes comfort in the child she is carrying.

Mary's song of praise and her personal testimony reflect her concern of the lowly and the hungry which in itself can tell us something about her character, and in actualizing her character one needs to pay attention to the prudence that she shows as virtue. The issue of caring for the less fortunate becomes a very important virtue in the life and ministry of Jesus. So, through the hermeneutic of creative actualization

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<sup>36</sup> Bernadette Brooten says that in order to re-tell the story of women in the Bible and their stories new questions need to be asked and that one would need to have a sound understanding of the social, political and economical conditions of women (Brooten 1985: 80).

one might point at this text and suggest that Jesus inherited this characteristic from his mother, thus not only giving Jesus the honor, (which he duly deserves) but also implying that the historical Mary, the mother of Christ, deserved this kind of honor based on her personal and character.

Writing the history of women does not mean that the history of men is discarded. All that it means is that women take the center role, whilst men take the center role in the history of men. The history of women very often also contains the history of people not stated in the normal historical writings like the history of children and the marginalised. The history of women therefore is a multi-dimensional look at various elements of the forgotten and voiceless.

In actualizing the experience of women the feminist critic does give unusual attention to the women in the text and it might seem out of place from some angles, but without such activity the women in the text will remain silent and concealed, forgotten and lost in interpretation. This will require a mind shift and a redefinition of the relationship between religion, culture, theology and society. "If women are no longer relegated to the cultural background or the societal context, but are recognized as central for understanding early Christianity and its theology, a rethinking of the whole will be required" (Brooten 1985: 91).

This rethinking forms part of what it requires to make the Bible relevant in all contexts but especially the context of Christians living in and under the yoke of poverty in the current South African climate.

### 3.4 SUMMARY

The social values of the ancient Mediterranean formed the basis for interaction in the whole of society. Applying the social-sciences to Luke 1: 39-56 shows how biblical texts are shaped and influenced by the social values of the times in which they originated. It has been suggested that honor and shame were the essential values but they overlap with other values like kinship, patron-client values, and economic values as well as views on limited good and the understanding of public and private spheres. Because the Bible or biblical text originated in a world with social and historical make up so much different to what the modern reader of the Bible is used to, it is essential to read the Bible through the lens of methods like the social-sciences in order to get a clear picture of what the text contains in its words as well as it's silence<sup>37</sup>.

At work in Luke 1:39-56 is first of all the values of kinship. Mary's visit to Elizabeth is much more than just mere siblings meeting to catch up on family matters. It has been argued in this chapter that Mary might have feared shaming her husband and family therefore her visit to Elizabeth. In relation to this fear her conversation with Elizabeth has been evaluated in terms of world views of the public and private sphere and what was permissible for women and men to say on certain platforms. The scene in the pericope taking place at the house of Zechariah restricts the two women in the text to the private world, and all they have to say has to be in women's circles as was the custom of the day. However both women acted antagonistically against the systems that kept them in the private sphere of society as they talk about forbidden things and exclaimed in the house of Zechariah.

Mary's personal experience gets reflected in vv 46-55 and here again a social scientific approach helped us to read the text in the light of concrete socio, economic, political concerns that give us an understanding of what these words might have meant to her without over-theologising the words. This exercise shows that indeed one needs to sometimes take into consideration first the social message of a text before adding theological value to. All begins with the questions one brings

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<sup>37</sup> Meaning the assumed context that which the author of the text presumed his audience would take for granted but which will be alien to the modern reader of the same text.

to the text, and therefore a social-scientific approach will not be the answer to all questions posed to the text but it proves to be an essential part of biblical interpretation. However it cannot operate on its own therefore the second part of this chapter made use of feminist hermeneutic to form a more informed reading of the text.

The latter part of this chapter concentrated on a feminist hermeneutic model that Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza suggests for biblical interpretation. It is four dimensional model that seeks to uncover androcentric influences on the text and reader and to recover the struggles of women and men (but in particular women as they were the most vulnerable in the societies that we read about in the Bible) in biblical times that have been lost in history and interpretation. This model, like all feminist critical models of interpretation, aims at a transformative reading of the text. Schüssler Fiorenza suggests that in order for wo/men to read the Bible as a transformative text the interpreter and the reader have to start with a hermeneutic of suspicion that will deconstruct all patriarchal and androcentric, oppressive and exclusive elements of the text. Then a hermeneutic of remembrance should be used to recall the particular concerns and struggles of women of the time in which the text originated. These concerns will illuminate those voices hidden in the dark corners of history's oppressive systems. The third leg of the process is to deploy a hermeneutic of proclamation that would call a spade a spade. In other words address the oppressive elements of the text and refuse to proclaim it as God ordained or as God's word in faith communities. On the other hand the hidden facts of the reality of women in the text and the possibilities of good news to the marginalised should also find expression in this part of the process. The last part of the process is what she calls a hermeneutic of creative actualisation.

The hermeneutic of creative actualisation focuses solely on the reconstruction of the text that would embody transformation. This part of the process of interpretation has the world behind the text as its target. Here a great deal of emphasis is placed on women and their particular interests. The text should be read to empower the vulnerable chief of whom were women in ancient societies and still are today. Feminist hermeneutics is not an attempt to relegate men and their history but rather an exercise in trying to re-balance the scales amidst the ills of patriarchal dominance

and the effects thereof. A transformed reading of a biblical text would imply that men and women read the text as two different genders but reading one history where both genders find a place of identification and solace on their own terms.

The following chapter will consist out of the same exegetical work as done in the current chapter. It will focus on Luke 4:16-30 as pericope and will use the same methods of interpretation namely that of a social scientific approach and feminist hermeneutics as complementing methods in interpretation.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC AND FEMINIST HERMENEUTICAL INSIGHTS ON LUKE 4:16-30

In the previous chapter we employed the social sciences as an interpretive method, and started to work towards social scientific readings of Luke 1:39-56. We also engaged in feminist hermeneutics to complement social scientific reading of the same pericope in order to strive for an emancipating reading of the text. The construction of this chapter will be the same as in the previous chapter. Here we will look at Luke 4: 16-30 as pericope while paying special attention to a hermeneutics informed by the social sciences as interpretive means in conjunction with hermeneutics of feminist theology as complementary schemes of interpreting the pericope at hand in order to reach or work towards an emancipated reading of the text. The concluding chapter will then apply the findings and suggestion of these chapters (chapters 3 and 4) to reach a final proposal of reading these texts in impoverished Christian communities as life giving, liberating, hope giving and emancipating texts.

#### 4.1 MOVING TOWARDS A SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC READING ON LUKE 4:16-30

From the two verses, preceding this pericope we learn that Jesus was ministering under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that his reputation reached the region of Galilee and that he used the synagogues as places of teaching and preaching. Now we move into the scene at Nazareth which is the setting for this pericope in this chapter.

##### 4.1.1 The homeless Jesus goes home

Luke's reference to Nazareth as the place where Jesus had been reared οὗ ἦν τεθραμμένος stands in sharp contrast to the place of his birth (Luke 2:4; 11) Bethlehem (as the fulfilment of the prophecy in Isaiah 9:5). For the purpose of this study it is important to note that Jesus' town of upbringing and probable experience

as a member of an artisan family<sup>38</sup> gives special significance and background to what follows in this pericope. The claims that Jesus makes in this pericope show strong solidarity with the poor and marginalised. This pericope follows on the temptation of Jesus Luke 4:1-12 and it precedes his ministry in Capernaum 4:31ff. However verse 23 of the pericope that we deal with alludes to Jesus having already ministered in Capernaum. Thus when Jesus came to Nazareth he already was renowned throughout the region 4:14-15.

Jesus' coming and going to and from Nazareth implies that he was 'homeless' (Luke 9:58) whether it was a voluntary or involuntary homelessness is a different matter. However, whichever way one looks at Jesus' homelessness it bears significant social implications. Reading Jesus as a wandering preacher, who had chosen to live that way, implies that he renounced possessions in favour of religious proclamation as a way of life. Whilst there is strong possibility that this might be the case one has to keep in mind that land was part of possession and in fact a means of survival for peasants while the privileged land owners benefited from most of the produce by these peasants. Besides the shame of being landless/homeless, one has also to consider Jesus' teachings and ministry concerning belonging to a family or home. Jesus teaches that the kingdom of God belongs to the poor (Luke 6:20) and his acts of healing almost always restore the marginalised to their community or place of belonging. Thus it seems contradictory to his teachings and ministry if Jesus' homelessness was a chosen way of life. This study would opt to argue for Jesus being homeless as an involuntary act and in fact forced upon him by socio-political circumstances.

Robert Brawley points out that in the time of Jesus, Galilee was a client kingdom of Rome under the leadership of a governor or client king. Herod Antipas in his reign of the region made Sepphoris and Tiberias the political and economical centres which dominate the rest of the region of Galilee. The elite and the client king had the military power of Rome at their disposal, meaning that the peasants felt the power of

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<sup>38</sup> The reference in Mark 6:3 to Jesus as τέκτων serves as indication of the possibility that Jesus came from an artisan family and that he might have been an artisan himself. This possibility together with the geographical location of Nazareth (country side) then place Jesus firmly amongst peasants who in the first century AD Palestine were placed under enormous strain by the social and political elites of the cities. Robert L. Brawley in his article *Homeless in Galilee* asserts that the elite (through the system of Patronage) took hold of the land of peasants and that the ratio of elite to peasants were 1-5% - 95% (Brawley 2011:2).



Rome through these aristocratic spheres. The intervention of Rome partly meant that land could be expropriated from the peasants as payment for debt and in the patronage system the land of a peasant would be taken and hired to him in order to maintain the values of the system (Brawley 2011: 2-3). There was very little chance of a peasant moving up in the social hierarchy and Brawley argues<sup>39</sup> that in the case of peasants and artisans in the region of Galilee, in the time of Jesus, it is very possible that downward mobility for Jesus' fellow peasants, and Jesus himself in the social sphere was quite likely. Thus Jesus' status as a homeless and wandering preacher holds more to it than a mere ascetic way of life. The social and political factors contributed an immense deal to his homeless status and everything he says and does should be read in the light of the social factors and values of the time. Jesus' solidarity with the poor and the oppressed therefore stems from experience and one can read this pericope (Luke 4:16-30) as opposition to the oppression and exploitation which he experienced. The homelessness of Jesus thus sets the scene for the pericope we work with.

#### **4.1.2 Patronage and Luke 4:16-30**

In this pericope Jesus takes the scroll of prophet Isaiah and reads three verses (Is.61; 1-2a and 58:6b) from the scroll that would later become known as what one might call his 'mission statement'. Then follows if not the shortest one of the shortest sermons ever preached "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). The essence of Jesus' mission statement is patronage. Those who heard Isaiah being quoted would have drawn the parallels between what they knew as a system of patronage and the things Jesus claimed to be fulfilled in their hearing. In other words Jesus stands in as patron for the poor, the captives, the blind and the oppressed. Yet there is difference in what Jesus means, what he is capable of doing and the regular system of patronage. In his mission statement the element of reciprocity, which was a vital element of patronage, is missing.

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<sup>39</sup> He argues that evidence suggests that as artisan Jesus' homelessness was forced upon him and not a choice and "in the midst of development of cities and estates in imperial systems that stripped land and its resources from peasants, Jesus declared his homelessness in solidarity with the poor and dispossessed. The Kingdom of God that He proclaimed included not merely God's ruling activity, but also God's ruling activity over the earth, which also means the land." (Brawley 2011:6).

#### *4.1.2.1 Reciprocity and patronage*

Ernest van Eck, working on the premise of the three sphere reciprocity adapted from the works of Stegemann and Stegemann, suggests that in first century Palestine reciprocity took place in three forms: generalised, balanced and negative reciprocity<sup>40</sup>. The system of patronage would have fallen in the second group of reciprocity but very often also in the third group. As pointed out earlier the elite controlled and dominated the economic and political resources of the region and through maintaining the oppressive values of the day became not only rich but also patrons of the peasants. Clients compete for patrons and patrons for clients. Clients (peasants) very often competed just for the sake of survival and patrons for riches and honor. The more clients a patron had the higher his or her honor would be. Thus hearing Jesus say that the scripture regarding the poor, the captive, the blind, and oppressed has been fulfilled, would have been seen as an attempt to win clients of which he would be the patron and it would increase his honor by a huge margin.

It is possible that the marginalised mentioned in Jesus' mission statement were all victims of negative reciprocity and the exploitation of patronage. In the system of patronage the patrons (elite) exploited and plundered rather than developed. The clients (peasants) were taxed and debts were created. The peasants often had to take loans to cover the taxes and in the process peasants lost their land and livelihood and stayed prisoner to the elite. The values of the elite were the values of the day and all systems like patronage were preserved in order to oppress the poor and sustain the elite (van Eck 2011: 6). The situation between peasants and elite/clients and patrons was a reflection of the imperial system, which regarded the Emperor as the ultimate patron and all his subjects as his clients. Under the oppressive hand of Rome the poor, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed had

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<sup>40</sup> General reciprocity one might say was the informal form of reciprocity which took place between family members, clan or tribe. This form of reciprocity took place when someone gives something without the expectation of receiving it back again. Balanced reciprocity had two dimensions: an exchange between social equals or an exchange between people of unequal social status. This form is best described by the phrase *quid pro quo*. The patron-client relation best fits the latter of the two dimensions. Negative reciprocity was based on exploitation and self interest, mostly in the form of the aristocrats exploiting their clients at the expense of the clients. (van Eck 2011:5-6).

very little chance of altering the system. Jesus' words of release thus had a political element to it; but above all the social relevance of what he said would have impacted the poor the most as words of relieve.

#### 4.1.3 The rich, the poor, and limited good: Luke 4:18-19

We find some striking similarities between the pericope that we handled in chapter three (Luke 1:39-56) and the pericope that we deal with here especially the themes of liberation and intervention of God (compare Luke 1: 52-53 and Luke 4:18-19). We also find the idea of a reversal of fortune in both of these pericopes. In the song of Mary we find the lowly being lifted up while the powerful have been brought down from their thrones and in the mission statement of Jesus the poor get good news and the dawning of the year of the Lord's favour.

The poor, the captives, and the oppressed are probably rural peasants who were unable to pay the debts they owned to their patrons. There were many ways in which these peasants could fall into debt for example the more dependants a farmer had the smaller the extent of his livelihood. Furthermore natural phenomena like droughts and inconsistent rainfall forced peasants to make loans for seed in order to exist. Then there were also the taxes<sup>41</sup> as pointed out earlier that weighed heavily upon the peasants. This all lead to the perpetuation of poverty and debt. In some cases peasants opted to flee from the land because of hopeless indebtedness to unreliable patrons (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992: 332-333). The mindset of the first century peasant was governed by the perception of limited good. Thus the poor person would only get out of poverty at the expense of someone else and that threatened the order of the whole village and society. In terms of honor, an honourable man would only be interested in what was legally and rightfully his. Being poor, captive or oppressed in this context would mean to be powerless to defend oneself and one's

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<sup>41</sup> Under Roman rule Palestine as well as most of the Mediterranean was forced to pay a variety of taxes. The main form of taxation was tribute which was a permanent tax all the conquered lands and peoples had to pay for administrative and military service. Furthermore there were taxation on land, crops, cattle and personal property. In addition to these taxes there were also wreath taxation that had to be paid on the birth day of the Hellenistic kings and later to the emperor, Salt taxation on which the emperor had ultimate control, Sales tax and Judicial fees on all trade. This was the norm in the Roman Empire but in Palestine there were also the religious taxes that had to be paid. These included Temple tax, the obligations of wood to burn at the altar, the offering of the first fruits of the crops, grain offerings and the tenth of the tithe to be paid by the Levites to the house of God (Reinstorf 2004: 336-340).

family. It also meant that one was unable to defend one's inherited status. Very often being labelled poor and falling into the condition of being incapable of defending their inherited status was a result of unfortunate events such as ill health such as, being blind or having leprosy (Reinstorf 2004: 332). Peasants viewed the rich and greedy. They took more than what was theirs and possessed more goods (including land, money, honor and favour) than they needed, at the expense of the poor, captives, and oppressed.

Jesus' quoting Isaiah must be read in the light of the above and his interpretation of the Isaiah passage gives new and fresh meaning to an ancient text. Gail O'Day suggests that the old nostalgic meaning of the Isaiah text gets transformed to proclamation for the current situation. The introduction to the explanation of the text, σήμερον/today, implies the immediacy of what Jesus means when he says that the scripture has been fulfilled, that he did not try to replicate past meanings and interpretation of the text but that he recreated the text for the present moment and circumstances (O'Day 2006: 360). This interpretation is met first with acceptance and then with contempt. There is a resistance to change (v.28) and part of the resistance is based on the understanding of honor and shame.

#### **4.1.4 Honor and shame in Luke 4:16-30**

If this pericope did not contain verses 23-30 it would have been a whole different story. The initial reaction of the whole synagogue was amazement ἐθαύμαζον and all spoke well of him Καὶ πάντες ἐμαρτύρουν αὐτῷ but then the harsh reality of the values of honor and shame step in when just one question is being asked οὐχὶ υἱὸς ἐστὶν Ἰωσήφ οὗτος; "Is not this Joseph's son?". It just took this one question to change the whole atmosphere in the synagogue. This question is a challenge to Jesus' honor. In other words, if he is the son of Joseph, how can he give such insightful teaching on the text? How can a peasant give such an honourable teaching? In their eyes Jesus was claiming honor that did not fit his social status.

#### *4.1.4.1 Honor and shame and challenge and riposte*

One has to keep in mind that ascribed honor was the honor that the person inherits by birth and that it stands in close relation to social status of that person. Furthermore this form of honor was the equivalent of wealth. This is the honor that is being called into question by the question of Jesus being Joseph's son. In addition to ascribed honor being questioned, Jesus, like any other rabbi of his day, acquired honor through what they taught and the challenge to his ascribed honor now also brings his acquired honor into dispute. As a man of his time Jesus had to defend his honor and he does so by playing the game of challenge-riposte<sup>42</sup> which would have been the normal cause of action once a challenge to one's honor had been made. In verse 24, Jesus then counters the challenge made by the question of his social status and he then uses portions of scripture (1Chron. 17:1, 9; 18:1; 2 Kings 5:1, 14) in his riposte (vv25-27). Defending one's honor was a part of the everyday life of the first century and everybody kept an eye on how families were able to defend their honor through the member of the family or clan or tribe as honourable status was the key factor in establishing public links which would have social, economic and political benefits (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992: 310).

#### *4.1.4.2 Honor and shame and violence*

The reply that Jesus gives in verses 25-27 carries much weight because of the way he uses scripture to shame his fellow villagers. This is a negative challenge not only to the synagogue but to the whole village and society. We therefore see in verses 28-29 a violent reaction to the negative challenge Jesus poses to the crowd. In 'honor and shame' societies violence was an expected form of riposte as we see in this pericope.

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<sup>42</sup> The smallest insult or injury to the honor of a person and more important the family had to be avenged at all cost or the honor of the family could be permanently lost. A challenge to honor could be positive or negative. Receiving a gift implied reciprocation in kind and therefore it is a positive challenge whereas an insult or questioning of one's inherited honor is a negative challenge. All challenge had to be reacted to otherwise it would imply weakness on the side of the one being challenged. Weakness equalled shame or being unable to defend the honor of the person or family. The game of challenge and riposte could be a matter of death and life. Losing the challenge could exclude families from business opportunities, social functions, potential alliances through marriage, where one could live, and even which religious roles one could part take in (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992: 310).

“From the viewpoint of what society considers valuable, violence may be directed to redistributing valuable resources or to maintaining those valuables. When violence is directed to the redistribution of valuables, it is revolutionary or reactionary. But when violence is aimed at the maintenance of what society considers valuable, that is, at maintenance of the status quo, it is vigilantism or establishment violence...the object of the crowd’s hostility is a person or group that seeks to alter generally the accepted meanings and or values” (Malina 2001: 43).

However an immediate overreaction of violence can also be interpreted as unintended public admission of failure and therefore shaming the one resorting to violence. The case of our pericope, leading Jesus to the brow of the hill might be a means of not quickly over-reacting and admitting that they, the crowd and villagers had been completely shamed by Jesus’ message and use of the scripture as means of interpreting the context. Whichever way one looks at it the villagers of Nazareth were shamed, for even their effort to kill him did not succeed as we see in verse 30.

## **4.2 MOVING TOWARDS A FEMINIST READING ON LUKE 4:16-30**

This part of the study will follow the same pattern as chapter 3 where the feminist hermeneutic of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza was used. The four-dimension hermeneutic model for interpretation that she suggests will be applied to this pericope.

Reading the Bible as we have it in canonical form we face the problems of theological redaction and traditional impediments that hide some aspects of the historical Jesus and the early Jewish-Christian movements established by Jesus himself. In other words the New Testament writers were not concerned with the writing and preservation of socio-historical accuracy but with the proclamation and rhetorical effects of Christ to his first followers and what he meant to the early Christian communities. Should one be interested in reading the Bible any other way (for example liberating and transformative ways) one needs to deploy a variety of, or a multi-disciplined approach. Here we are going to try to demonstrate show how this can be done on Luke 4: 16-30 by complimenting the social-scientific reading of the pericope in question with the four-dimensional hermeneutical approach of Schüssler Fiorenza. Any reconstruction of the text needs a sound foundation of socio-historical, political and economic rudiments of the text. This study supposes that the social-science has helped with establishing such a sound foundation and that the feminist hermeneutics are a plausible means of reconstruction.

### **4.2.1 The hermeneutic of suspicion applied to Luke 4:16-30**

As we have suggested in the previous chapter 'the hermeneutic of suspicion' starts with the experience of women. Because of the social values and ideologies of the time, women and children were often the most vulnerable and underrated in honor and shame societies. This pericope on face value looks to be very positive in terms of the marginalised and vulnerable, therefore one might think that it would be a positive text to feminist readers. The text seems to be live-giving and liberating in essence therefore Luke can be seen as giving the women their due and deserved place even if not explicitly mentioning them in this pericope.

However this argument falls apart when through the lens of suspicion one looks at the setting of the pericope. Almost the whole scene of the rejection of Jesus at Nazareth takes place at the synagogue<sup>43</sup>. This means that it took place in the public sphere. The public sphere as we saw in the previous chapter was the area associated with male dominance and male societal roles. This immediately dismisses or weakens any positive reading of the text in terms of feminist interpretation. Moreover the very act of Jesus teaching excludes women from the equation as it was a male role reserved for honourable men of the time. The experience of women thus does not include teaching and public activity such as that portrayed in this pericope.

'The hermeneutic of suspicion' would furthermore pay special attention to verses 28-29 and highlight the violent character of the pericope as something peculiar too, and specific to patriarchal and androcentric societies. Here once again we see how social science can complement feminist hermeneutic. A social scientific approach already pointed out the violent character of the text and how the society of the day permitted it. Feminist hermeneutics would argue for a reading that would not underestimate the violent nature of the society and how that violence affected women, children and the vulnerable. Furthermore the hermeneutic of suspicion would make the reader aware of how violence perpetuates the institutions and systems and people that benefit from violent societies. One would thus find that in most cases if not all that the finger points at the rich, educated men and very often a minority in relation to the rest picture of society.

Moreover a feminist reading of the pericope would also question any theological interpretation that over emphasize the spiritual significance of the pericope at the expense of the social evils contained in the text. Thus, should one opt to read the last verse in the pericope (v.30) as God's intervention without addressing or at least

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<sup>43</sup> There is evidence that suggest that women might have been leaders in ancient Hellenistic Jewish synagogues. Bernadette Brooten worked on an ancient inscription which refers to women as presbytra and presbyterissa who have been on synagogue councils. These councils' functions included oversight of the finances of the synagogue and even taking part in the daily reading and studying of scripture. The counter argument to this notion, of women being leaders of the synagogue, is that the titles are to be linked to that of their husbands who would have been the leaders of the synagogue or to read the title literally which would mean that they were old women or the older sister of other siblings or honorary titles which would not imply function of any sort. However the possibility still remains intact and sound that women were actual leaders in synagogues (Kraemer 1985: 431-435).



naming the violence as bad, the hermeneutic of suspicion would relegate such an interpretation and label it as a continuation of the status quo as oppressive.

Having said the above, one has to acknowledge that 'the hermeneutic of suspicion' most often works well when the text is prescriptive and not descriptive. This pericope is much more descriptive than prescriptive thus the hermeneutic of suspicion has a limit to its use here. However feminist critique always moves from the premise that the Bible as a book is patriarchal to its core and androcentric in its language, therefore if no other need is found for the hermeneutic of suspicion, it would be deployed to literally analyse the text and criticise its androcentric patriarchal use of language. This part of the study is however not so much concerned with the literal analysis of the text but rather with the powers of patriarchy and revealing the hidden powers of patriarchy (such as violence in society) in the text.

#### **4.2.2 The hermeneutic of remembrance applied to Luke 4:16-30.**

In general exegetes often refer to the gospel of Luke as the gospel in which women takes a central role. That might be true, but from the perspective of this study it is important not to be satisfied with that presupposition, thus the hermeneutic of remembrance seeks to move beyond exclusive interpretations<sup>44</sup> of the text to recover what one might call the history of both men and women (Schüssler Fiorenza 1986: 29). The hermeneutic of remembrance often draws the distinction between whether the text should be read in the light of the historical Jesus<sup>45</sup> or, the early Christian communities to whom the gospel writer wrote the gospels. In other words, this specific element of feminist interpretation, seeks to uncover if the author appeals to the power of the resurrected Christ or Jesus of Nazareth as a first century person who lived, experienced, and negotiated the socio-historical, political, economic, and religious elements of his day and time. This distinction becomes important to the feminist interpreter as one would have to keep in mind that the author wrote to a

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<sup>44</sup> All interpretations that exclusively look from the perspective of educated male interpreters or interpretation that does not allow for growth and liberation of marginalised people reading the text.

<sup>45</sup> The historical Jesus refers to Jesus the actual person in a specific time, location, setting with actual historicity, whereas the Jesus in relation to the early Christian communities refers to the resurrected Lord Jesus. The post-resurrected Jesus holds different properties in relation to the historical Jesus e.g. The post-resurrected Lord Jesus gets proclaimed since his resurrection whilst it was the historical Jesus that suffered on the cross and provided the foundation for the resurrected Lord Jesus.

specific audience experiencing their own social reality and trying to make sense of Jesus Christ in their own time.

The theological and pastoral impact of the text therefore comes next to social occurrences of the first century Palestine. Schüssler Fiorenza would suggest that one looks at the language of the text to establish whether one should read the text in the light of the historical Jesus or the resurrected Christ. In the case of our pericope it would be difficult to find evidence that suggests that the author is appealing to the resurrected Christ. The whole pericope is full of socio-historical elements, such as those explained by the social-sciences earlier on, that suggests that one should read this pericope in the light of the historical Jesus.

Luke 4:16-30 read in the light of the historical Jesus through the lens of the hermeneutic of suspicion reveals the patriarchal elements of the text. But the hermeneutic of remembrance shows that in verses 18-19 and 25-27 the struggles of women were important to the historical Jesus. Jesus shows special interest in the marginalized. The prophetic function of Jesus (vv18-19) includes liberating women and men from their daily struggles (such as we have seen in the earlier part of this chapter). Moreover the prophetic function of Jesus was also shared by the Old Testament prophets (vv25-27) and here we see Jesus explicitly highlighting the struggles of women, widows, aliens and the sick.

“That Jesus’ experience in the town of Nazareth has for Luke a symbolic programmatic character seen in the appeal now made to the careers of Elijah and Elisha. These vv.25-27 provide justification from the Old Testament for the Christian mission to the Gentiles” (Fitzmeyer 1981: 537).

There is good news in this pericope for women. Jesus not only reflects on the experience and struggles of women but also uses it to critique the oppressive systems of patriarchy. In verse 25 we see that Jesus points out that women are among those who are affected the most when disaster strikes (for example the widows in the time of famine in Israel and Sidon v25b -26). That is because they are the most vulnerable in a society organised by patriarchal systems. Moreover the women of Israel suffered because of the ignorance of patriarchal values in the time of Elijah. As in the case of Jesus in this pericope, Elijah’s message was not well

received (1 Kings 16:29-17:24) and the leaders of his time acted on social values that did not please God. As a result those who suffered the most were the most vulnerable in that society. Yet the prophet was sent to a widow of Zarephath in a neighbouring region who did receive God's help. This shows that God has compassion for the struggles of the vulnerable and women in particular as they are often the most vulnerable in patriarchal societies. This compassion gets reflected in the mission statement of Jesus and by adding this story from 1 Kings to the defence of his honor not only shamed the villagers of Nazareth but it also shows that Jesus continues in the "*missio Dei*"<sup>46</sup> a mission that takes seriously the issues of the marginalised and in particular women.

The text thus invites women to read this as women with particular struggles and to identify with Jesus who himself got rejected because of what he believed and expressed. Jesus gives the voiceless a voice and place in a society that would otherwise silence them. The hermeneutic of remembrance would go on to suggest that although there would be reaction and resistance to such change (such as violence as we see in the pericope) it would be imperative for women and feminist interpreters to not only read the text in this light but also to air the silent voices and share the experience and struggles of women in particular otherwise the status quo would be kept intact and oppression perpetuated.

#### 4.2.3 The hermeneutic of proclamation

The hermeneutic of proclamation has a twofold task in the case of Luke 4:16-30. First it must insist that the patriarchal element of the text cannot be proclaimed as the word of God. The patriarchal and male centred features of the text must be proclaimed as particular to the context in which it originated or as the word of the author and his social context (or even that of the audience to whom the author wrote). The second task of the hermeneutic of proclamation is that it must proclaim the liberating sense of the text. It must bring to the fore that women, men, and the

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<sup>46</sup> "*Missio Dei*" is used here as a term that describes the work of God throughout the Bible as particularly represented in the actions and mission of the Old Testament prophets and here now also visible in the work and ministry of Jesus.

marginalised can find solace in the historical Jesus who experienced rejection and gave a voice to the voiceless.

The first function of the hermeneutic of proclamation would then be to critique the use of violence in the text. Whether this text is used in academic or religious context the violent character that we find in the latter part of the pericope can never be proclaimed as God ordained. Here the hermeneutic of suspicion helps in deconstructing the text in order to reconstruct it. Therefore the violent tendency in the text must be proclaimed as a character of the patriarchal society and a critique on violence in the text as part of the society in which it takes place should also critique other related elements of patriarchal societies.

In close relation to the above the hermeneutic of proclamation would have to critically analyse the impact of social values such as honor and shame. The question in verse 22b poses a challenge to a theological understanding of Jesus as the son of God, but from a sociological perspective it stands as an insult to people of lower class (such as artisans and peasants). For the purpose of this study it is interesting to note the consequence and the extent of this question in terms of social significance. This question highlights the vulnerability of the people of the lower orders of the time. Moreover it moves from a male perspective questioning the paternal relation of Jesus and not the maternal which in itself speaks of the sense with which women were treated. The hermeneutic of proclamation needs to take into full account the extent to which this neglect of female concerns affected both men and women in the text, and the modern reader of the text, and how these elements of patriarchy were and are internalised even to the point that it is not recognised and in some cases defended by those who are victims of it.

The second function of the hermeneutic of proclamation is to announce the good news coming from this pericope. The good news in this pericope is not so much that Jesus fulfils the prophetic word of Isaiah nor the theological implication of what Jesus says in this text but rather that Jesus first of all associates with the marginalised and oppressed and secondly that Jesus becomes the embodiment of resistance to the powers that be. It is the opinion of this study that in order to announce good news and promote liberation, there needs to be some sort of alignment with those who

need the good news or something in common with those who suffer as a result of oppression, poverty, exploitation and negative dominant structures. The hermeneutic of proclamation aims to understand the “*Sitz im Leben*” of the text in order to read the historical Jesus as “part and parcel” of the socio-historical, which includes feminist-historical, setting of the text. Here in this pericope the historical Jesus negotiates his own context in such a way that he becomes a radical teacher and therefore a threat to the social systems at larger. It is in that threat to the system that women and men can find the good news. Wo/men can find themselves comfort in the fact that they can retell this story, that we find in this pericope, in such a way that it gives meaning to their own struggles with oppressive systems and attempts to dim or silence the voices of masses of people such as those with whom Jesus associates himself with in the text<sup>47</sup>.

Furthermore, the hermeneutic of proclamation should declare all possibilities, whether they are just possible or very plausible, that alludes to positive outlooks on women in particular. The hermeneutic of suspicion suggested that in some ancient societies, especially the Hellenistic-Jewish communities, women might have been involved in leadership roles in the synagogues<sup>48</sup>. This notion is an empowering thought for feminist critical readers of the text and should be enhanced but also examined by preachers and scholars alike.

The hermeneutic of proclamation therefore becomes the first step in reconstructing what the hermeneutic of suspicion and the hermeneutic of remembrance deconstructed. The proclamation part of the process is the obverse of the same coin as suspicion. In reconstructing the text the emphasis should be on positive transformation which would include the experience and struggles of wo/men female and male alike and one can even go further to say that it should include the struggles of creation. The hermeneutic of proclamation helps the exegete to become relevant to a much larger group of people; but from this study’s perspective it must start with

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<sup>47</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza suggest that a feminist critical model of reading and interpreting the Bible should not only consist of the normal and formal methods and themes of biblical interpretations for example historical, rhetorical, ideological, theological and ethical issues but should also employ elements, methods and themes of storytelling, role-play, music, arts and so forth in order to create a different religious imagination (Schüssler Fiorenza 1998: 87).

<sup>48</sup> Referring to the question of women elders in the Diaspora Jewish communities, with special reference to Eulogia as elder, as discussed by Ross S. Kraemer (Kraemer 1985).

the experience of women. From what we have learned through this pericope it must be rooted in the Jesus who opposed and challenged structures of oppression and exploitation. It is in the proclamation of God's word that the church either succeeds or fails to make the Bible relevant to the people who hear the word. Therefore this step in the hermeneutical process is so important not only to feminist interpreters and interpretation, but also to all other forms of biblical interpretation or should at least be if it is not the case.

“A hermeneutics of proclamation would require that biblical scholars, teachers, and preachers learn how to explore not only their own but also the cultural-religious locations of their audiences and adjudicate the impact or effects that their biblical interpretations have on such audiences, especially on those who credit the scriptures with divine authority” (Schüssler Fiorenza 1998: 138).

#### **4.2.4 The hermeneutic of creative actualization applied to Luke 4:16-30**

“Hermeneutics of actualization employs all our creative powers to celebrate and make present the suffering, struggles and resurrection of our biblical fore sisters and foremothers” (Schüssler Fiorenza 1986: 32).

If applied to our pericope of Luke 4:16-30 it means that one has to re-read this text not only from the perspective of women but also to place women in the text. One would have to read the text with imaginative contemplation to see the women of Nazareth in the text and in the synagogue. The hermeneutic of remembrance and that of proclamation have alluded to the possibility that women might have been involved in day to day synagogue setting thus it is not farfetched to colour this text with the presence of women. But the presence of women won't be enough. One would have to image the reaction of these women to the words that Jesus utters in the text. The reaction of the women must be a reflection of the struggles and concerns women faced in Luke's time.

I therefore would imagine that a revisit of the story in Luke 4:16-30 would be told in the first person female voice of one of the local women in the village of Nazareth.

Here follows such a revisiting of the text from the perspective of a hermeneutic of actualization by one of the local women in the village.

*I am Elizabeth from Nazareth. This afternoon I went to the synagogue as is the custom here to worship my God. To my surprise the Rabbi that gave the instruction today was Jesus the son of Mary and Joseph. It was so good to see and hear one of our own children giving the instruction today. I have known Jesus since he was a little boy. He grew up in front of me you know. He used to carry my water for me from the well seeing that I have no boy of my own. I have great respect for him but today my respect for him grew greater.*

*He stood up and read that familiar passage from the prophet Isaiah that says:*

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” (Luke 4:18-19).*

*Then he gave new meaning to the piece and astonished all present there when he said: “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). When he said this I immediately thought of my own household and how I and my four daughters have to struggle to survive while my husband’s income never seems to be enough so that we might be set free from the debts to the master of the field. I and my three daughters have to bake bread for all our neighbours in order to exchange it for some vegetables and money so that we can buy more flour (Osiek 2006: 822). There’s never a profit to put away because the master of the field always taxes my husband so much that we cannot really live in comfort. My husband John is my second husband my first husband Levi died of a disease of the lungs when I was only 15 years of age and so I had to marry his brother, as is our custom. O my troubles are so great! All four of my daughters have been raped<sup>49</sup> and so it is difficult for them to get married (Osiek 2006: 827-828); and Tamara who is my youngest is blind so she cannot help me. All of this has put our family in a very shameful position*

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<sup>49</sup> Sexuality was an inescapable part of life for the lower classes and it is believed that no one grew up innocent of sex except the daughters of the elite who grew up in homes where they would not be exposed to sexual encounters in order to make them priced elite brides (Osiek 2006:828).

*and my husband gets mocked every day. If only I had a male child then maybe things would have been a little different around here.*

*But today that man Jesus, who knows us, gave me hope and courage to carry on. We really need more people like him around this village. He promotes the cause of the oppressed and poor, like us, and he even goes to the point of causing disturbance. Everybody was astonished at his words but then the jealousy that keeps us where we are, stuck its head out. The men in our village tried to shame him by referring to his father Joseph who is an ordinary carpenter. Their view is that a son of a carpenter cannot be such a powerful and well loved instructor. Instead of listening to what he had to say and supporting him they tried to shame him. But he taught them a good lesson in honor and shame. He knows the scriptures better than the whole lot. He pointed out to them that in the days of Prophet Elijah and Prophet Elisha the deliverance of God most high came upon foreign people because our own people did not listen to the prophets. If only our men would listen to this prophet and welcome him in his home town then maybe he could have cured people like Tamara who is blind. But no, they did not listen to him! He shamed them in such a way that they wanted to kill him.*

*The sad thing about their action is that people like us, like my family, pull at the shortest end of the rope as we missed out on his works and what he might have done for this whole village. But I take strength in the courage that he showed and that he spoke of people like us. Maybe he will return one day and free us from all the troubles we experience. This thought gives me hope and Mary and Joseph's son is the reason for my being hopeful.*

This reconstruction of the text is a simple attempt to show how “feminist interpreters have searched in biblical text and interpretation histories for meanings that focus attention on women and gender and subvert or expose androcentric conventions” (Scholz 2010: 25).



### 4.3 SUMMARY

In this chapter we have looked at Luke 4:16-30 through the hermeneutical lenses of the social-sciences and feminist interpretation. The social-sciences pointed out that what Jesus said in this pericope was to show solidarity with the poor and oppressed. It has been argued that this solidarity with the poor and oppressed stems from personal experience of the village life in Nazareth. As a son of an artisan and as peasant villager Jesus grew up with the social reality of exploitation, taxes, patronage, honor and shame and so forth. All of these elements of his social realities were often associated with and embedded in violence.

Thus the teaching that Jesus gives is a reflection of social circumstance of his time which made him relevant but also unpopular. With the help of the social-sciences we have a better understanding as to why his teachings were relevant and made him unpopular. The reaction against Jesus in this particular pericope highlights the pattern of thought amongst Jesus' peers and fellow villagers. Their world views and social values of honor and shame dictated their behaviour and it has been argued in this chapter that the villagers of Nazareth felt that a person from a lower class in the social standing cannot make such honourable suggestions and instruct in the way that Jesus did. They therefore challenged his honor by questioning his origins and family ties, as was the norm in honor and shame societies.

A social scientific approach to the text also helps in understanding Jesus' riposte to the challenge he faced. His reaction shows that he was well acquainted with the properties of honor and shame and therefore also with challenge and riposte. As a man of his time it would have brought him and his family shame if he did not respond in a way that would shame those who tried to shame him. The counter action to Jesus' riposte was violence. Violence was a common feature of honor and shame societies. It has also been suggested that the crowd's turning to violence as means of settling their issues with Jesus could in itself be viewed as admitting defeat by someone they viewed as unworthy of the honor he acquired through his powerful way of teaching and instruction.

The one thing that a social-scientific reading of this pericope and a feminist reading of the same pericope have in common is that both view Jesus as opposing the status quo and in doing so associates with the marginalised and oppressed. From a social-scientific approach to the text this chapter suggests that it is his own experience of growing up under the yoke of oppression and exploitation that caused his strong views.

The latter part of this chapter followed the same pattern of interpretation as the latter part of the third chapter. Here the same four dimensional model of Schüssler Fiorenza was used to move towards a feminist critical reading of Luke 4:16-30. The hermeneutic of suspicion highlighted the fact that the whole pericope excludes women from the story by the setting in which the story and happenings at Nazareth took place. The synagogue was part of public space and therefore would have limited the involvement of women in the story. The public sphere was in the ancient Mediterranean the social place of men; and men would have dominated all aspects of public life. The hermeneutic of suspicion also pointed out that the violent character of the text was a prevalent part of honor and shame societies which in turn was the hall mark of patriarchal and androcentric societies. A feminist critical reading of the text would not underestimate the nature and effects of violence in such societies and would urge the interpreter to expose the violent elements of the text to the fullest measure, in order to make the modern reader aware not only of the reality of the vulnerable in the text and of the time in which the text originated but also to make them aware of how violence, however subtle, still affects the vulnerable today and very often women experience the effects of violence the most (as was the case in biblical times).

The hermeneutic of remembrance looked specifically at verses 18-19 and 25-27 as means of seeing Jesus as a historical male person siding with the vulnerable and women in particular. The aim of this part of the process in feminist hermeneutics is to bring to the fore the struggles of women and recalling the forgotten voices of history. Thus Jesus' mission statement and his riposte to the challenge the crowd posed at him, becomes a form of remembering the struggles and issues of women otherwise forgotten and relegated by male dominant interpretations.

The hermeneutic of proclamation took on a two sided function. First of which was to set the scene for proclaiming the androcentric and patriarchal elements of the text as rudiments of a society governed by the ills of patriarchal dominance, chief among which was the violent character of the text, and not God ordained or God's word. The second function of the hermeneutic of proclamation did the opposite of the first. To proclaim the liberating and transformative nature of the pericope as God's word. In this section the possibility of female leadership or at least involvement in the daily acts of the synagogue was explored. The notion that Jesus associated with the marginalised has been argued for and was suggested as thought of comfort to modern readers of the text thus it should be proclaimed as such by biblical scholars and preachers alike.

The final step of the hermeneutic model of Schüssler Fiorenza applied to Luke 4:16-30 resulted in an imaginative reconstruction of the text that would be liberating and transformative to women reading the text amidst their own struggles and circumstances. In this section of the process a female voice in the first person was created on the basis of socio-historical facts about women in the first century Mediterranean. This was done as a simple exercise and practical way in which the hermeneutic of creative actualization could be deployed.

The next chapter will be an attempt to correlate the findings and suggestions made in this and the previous chapter. Chapter five will also start to explore theoretical possibilities of social-scientific feminist readings of a text in order to make the bible a living, relevant and transformative text for Christians living in impoverished communities today.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **TOWARDS A CONSIDERATE READING OF BIBLICAL TEXTS BASED ON THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND FEMINIST HERMENEUTICS**

Chapter one gave the introduction to this study with the projected outline for the thesis. Chapter two investigated the socio-historical background to the first century Mediterranean world as premise for this study. Special attention was given to the social values of the time and the major values and world views were elaborated in that chapter. The third chapter consists out of exegetical work on Luke 1:39-56 through the methodologies of the social-sciences and feminist hermeneutics as interpretative lenses. The same is true of chapter four. In this chapter I will correlate the findings of the previous chapters and explore possible theoretical avenues of reading these texts (Luke 1:39-56 and 4:16-30) and other biblical texts as transformative and life giving texts in Christian communities that suffers under the yoke of poverty.

#### **5.1 THE IMPLICATIONS OF READING BIBLICAL TEXTS THROUGH THE LENS OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES**

It is important to remember that when we engage in any reading activity that we bring our own baggage to the text and that the text itself carries its own. In the case of biblical texts the two realms (that of the reader and that of the text) are separated by socio-historical, economic, political, and religious gaps that often make the reading of such texts inconclusive in relation to a common or static meaning. "People thus approach the Bible from radically different historical paradigms, and consequently come to different conclusions" (Mouton 1995: 215).

Each interpreter and reader of the text starts from a specific point of view and therefore brings his or her own questions to the text. In this study it has been argued that readers of the Bible need to engage with the text at root level which implies that the social situation of the reader takes precedence in compiling the reader's point of departure and sets of questions the reader brings to the text. A social-scientific approach in association with feminist hermeneutics have been suggested and

demonstrated as methodologies that might make this reading process more contextual with regards to the reader's own social situation. But where does the social-sciences as reading method leave the reader and how does it advocate for a way forward?

### **5.1.1 The social sciences in relation to low context societies**

It has been argued in 2.1 and 2.6 that in order for a modern reader to understand the socio- historical, economic and political context of the Bible s/he needs to know how these elements operated in its social setting. In the third and fourth chapters of this work it has been demonstrated that a social scientific approach helps in uncovering some of the meanings hidden to the modern reader by looking at the social values and the way they operated within the context of pericopes that were discussed. This demonstration clearly shows that the context in which pericopes like Luke 1:39-56 and 4:16-30 originated relied on the knowledge and imagination of the first audience(s) to know or take for granted certain characteristics of the time and setting. Thus for example the first audience of Luke 1: 39-56 would have known the values and characteristics of patronage and therefore the author had no need to explain it in his text.

We live in what Malina calls 'low context' societies meaning that we produce detailed verbal documents that give priority to details and leaves little room for informal imagination and chance (Malina 2001: 2). We therefore have detailed contracts for almost all public activities between two or more partners, explaining to the finest detail the mode of operation and requirements of each partner of the endeavour. The society in which the Bible originated (for the purpose of illustration let's use the ancient Mediterranean) was on the other hand what Malina calls a 'high context' society. "High context societies produce sketchy and impressionistic documents, leaving much to the reader's or hearer's imagination and common knowledge" (Ibid).

Thus one of the implications of a social-scientific reading of biblical texts is that the reader has to delve deep to find ideologies and values that are not explicitly stated in the text and find ways of exploring the common knowledge the text assumes. The social-sciences as method gives tremendous insight (not that other methods does

not) into the assumed common knowledge of biblical texts. Once the assumed common knowledge has been established the reader then can make sense of the text and get a clearer picture of its interpretation and reception history.

In 'low context' societies this method of reading might be used to complement other readings of the text and only be partially used to answer sets of questions that other interpretative models bring to the text. As academic method of interpretation the social-sciences brings about a cross-cultural reading of the text that compel the reader or interpreter into unfamiliar scenes, alien, to his or her own. That in turn might help with "hybrid reconciliation" processes where cultural fusions have taken place in the past for example in post-colonial regions (Rukundwa 2008: 347-348).

Furthermore, a social-scientific reading of biblical texts implies that politics and religion cannot be separated from any other social factors such as economic factors. Chapter three and four of this study showed that political influence in the text is prominent though not explicitly mentioned. This further implies that Jesus cannot be solely viewed a religious leader. What he said and did if not politically motivated had political effects<sup>50</sup>.

"Any scenario that filters out or excludes ancient Mediterranean political and domestic relations and values as peripheral to New Testament understanding will have to be at least anachronistic, certainly ethnocentric. A considerate reading of the New Testament requires readers to envision Jesus' social movement as religion configured by the parameters and concerns of politics" (Malina 2001: 160).

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<sup>50</sup> Jesus as political figure might be an unthinkable thing to do in some religious circles but this is the nature of and characteristic of the social-sciences as reading method of the Bible. It therefore not only highlights the understanding that the method might bring cultural shock to modern readers but also invites the reader to rethink their understanding of Jesus and theological concepts like salvation for example a social-scientific reading of salvation and saviour would heavily lean on salvation as current or concrete examples of social alleviation.

### 5.1.2 The social sciences in relation to theological concepts

If the social-sciences leads us to think about Jesus and his movement as political configured what does that say about our theological understanding of Jesus? In chapter four of this study 4.1.2 it was suggested that the essence of Jesus' mission statement is patronage and that Jesus stands in as patron of the poor, captives, blind, and oppressed. From a Christological perspective, based on a social-scientific interpretation, this would mean that Jesus associates with these people from his own experience as marginalised. This it is what one might call a discovered Christology at work in the text, meaning that the historical Jesus becomes the saviour of people in and from his own time by means of addressing social ills like the discrepancies in the patronage system(s) of the time. The idea of a Christology from below would then imply that eschatological views of the Christ would not point towards the future or future liberation but an actualised liberation already at work within the life and context of the historical Jesus.

Soteriology then becomes liberation from the actual socio-political and economic oppression and not an idea of salvation in the afterlife. This also shapes the idea of materialistic needs being the most prominent needs in the life of people living in societies governed by systems like patronage. Furthermore this leads us to the concept of the kingdom of God as it stands opposed to the Roman Empire. Whilst the Roman emperors are seen as the ultimate patrons through the eyes of those in the patronage system whether client or patron, Jesus here (Luke 4:16-30) starts with the inauguration of the kingdom of God with God as the ultimate patron (see the table in 3.2.5) with Jesus being the ultimate representative of God's reign (therefore patron) of those under the reign of God. The kingdom of God which Jesus brings about through his mission has opposing values to the Roman Empire. Jesus proclaims God's will to those trapped in the Roman Empire, those who have very little going for them and those who are exploited. Jesus' reference to the year of the Lord's favour in Luke 4:19 lines his mission up with the will of God as expressed in the Torah Jubilee. The same will that was God's within the days of the prophets we see in the days of Jesus. The kingdom of God therefore does not only have theological suggestion but has concrete aims which stand hostile to that of Rome.

“...the proclamation of the kingdom of God with God controlling his own land in terms of Torah jubilee entailed the redistribution of wealth in Israel and restitution on the part of the wealthy Israelites. Such redistribution and restitution as part of the political economy willed by God were of primary concern, as in the Torah and the Prophets” (Malina 2001: 111).

This suggests that a reading based on the social-sciences implies that theology must broaden its concepts of salvation and God’s kingdom to incorporate concrete social views into it therefore heaven or ideas of heaven as God’s kingdom should start with a liberation of earth as God’s kingdom. One can almost say that there is no heaven without a transformed earth. Jesus’ challenge on the status quo of his day and time through the lenses of social-scientific criticism points us to transformation of our systems that oppress, relegate, and exploit, into the kingdom of God which liberates, releases, gives sight and brings good news.

## **5.2 IMPLICATIONS OF READING BIBLICAL TEXTS THROUGH THE LENS OF FEMINIST HERMENEUTICS**

It might seem that feminist hermeneutics as method of reading the Bible has only the critique of patriarchy and androcentricism as its objective. However a closer look at feminist hermeneutics, (for example Schüssler Fiorenza’s *In Memory of Her*) like it has been used in chapters three and four of this study, shows that this method consists of much more than just mere criticism on patriarchy and androcentric elements. This method of interpretation points out and rejects sexist characteristics of the Bible as authoritative, it helps in the recovery of the history of women and writes them back into the text of biblical scriptures, it seeks ways in which the Bible empowers and transforms the lives of wo/men and promotes the proclamation of such empowering and transformation, and it seeks out the vulnerable (wo/men) in the text where other interpretative methods overlook them and bring their voices to the forefront.



### 5.2.1 Feminist hermeneutics in relation to patriarchal societies

One of the implications that feminist hermeneutics has in common with that of the social sciences is that for the modern reader this model of interpretation can take the reader into a context that seems strange and alien. The effects of patriarchy have been so vast and internalised that even women read biblical texts as men would. The subliminal dominance of patriarchy is hidden in words that both wo/men have taken for granted in modern societies and the effects thereof can have results that perpetuate oppression and dominance of one group over another. Thus for example the title Lord which is a premium character of patriarchal dominance is taken as having solely theological implications. Yet this title comes and is adopted from patronage systems like that of the ancient Roman Empire with political implications rather than theological ones.

Furthermore God-language has become a particular concern of feminist readers of the Bible. When masculine gender references are made to God feminist hermeneutics maintain that one asks whether the text insists on “the natural masculine gender of God or whether such a genderization and sexualization of God is against the intention of the biblical text and its theological context” (Schüssler Fiorenza 1988: 44). Often the counter argument against non-masculine translations for God is based on the requirements for literal translations; however every translation is based on interpretation as well (Ibid). Therefore the implications of a feminist reading of biblical texts open vast possibilities of using metaphors (biblical and extra-biblical) for talking about God. In fact all the images and language that we use to talk about God can only be metaphorical and not concrete because God surpass our understanding. Feminist hermeneutics help us to realise that what we think and say about God in concrete terms can only lead to us making an idol of God.

Another implication of feminist hermeneutical readings of biblical texts is that it constantly invites new experiences into the reception history of the Bible. Everyday life experiences of wo/men become a measure rod of how relevant the Bible is in

their lives. Whereas other methods of interpretations seem to struggle in bridging the gap between the academic reader of the text and the lay-reader of the text, feminist critical methods reach women in different contexts<sup>51</sup> where they read through new lenses and develop feminist models particular to their own social situation and contexts (Rakoczy 2004: 192-193).

### 5.2.2 Feminist hermeneutics in relation to theological concepts

Of central importance to feminist hermeneutic is the concept of liberation and transformation. It has been argued in chapter three and four of this study that from a feminist hermeneutical point of view the text has to be life giving and transformative to both wo/men but especially women as the most vulnerable and exploited in patriarchal societies. In terms of theological concepts (based on feminist hermeneutics) the understanding and work of the Holy Spirit takes precedence in the life of the Church. The pneumatology of the resurrection is the prime example of liberation and transformation, the same Spirit that brought life from the grave is the same Spirit that motivates the feminist critical notion of seeking life in textual interpretation (Schüssler Fiorenza 1988: 184). There is a sense of something new that have been created, out of hopeless situations, in this method of interpretation. Luke 4: 14 & 18 picks up this idea of the role and work of the Spirit. Jesus was filled with the Spirit and therefore those who follow his way of life and are baptised in his name also share in the same Spirit. "In baptism Christians enter the force field of the Spirit, share in ecstatic experiences, and are 'sent' to proclaim the gospel in the power of the Spirit..." (Schüssler Fiorenza 1998: 199).

To some extent one may say that feminist hermeneutics enhance theological understanding but on the other hand one of the implications of feminist hermeneutics can also be critical of theology in order to criticize and transform theological debate. Some feminist theologians find it necessary to send shock waves through the

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<sup>51</sup> Feminist hermeneutical critics like Schüssler Fiorenza gave multiple workshops on feminist biblical interpretation around the world: in India, the Philippines, Brazil, Chile, Switzerland, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa and have helped shaped local feminist critical models of interpretations but they also shaped her own understanding of biblical interpretation (Rakoczy 2004: 195).

Christian world in order to get the process of transformation and awareness<sup>52</sup> running amidst patriarchal dominance. Besides the naming of God, theological anthropology, and in particular concerning the issue and definition of sin as well as human embodiment, are some of the most crucial theological issues for feminist theologians. It therefore implies that the theological implications of these issues are constantly challenged and changed as feminist theologians engage with them (Muers 2008: 432).

Feminist hermeneutics aims at transformation. Whether transformation is understood in political, social, economic, historic or religious/theological terms, through the lens of feminist hermeneutics, it points towards good news for both wo/men. Therefore a inter-disciplinary relationship with other disciplines of biblical study, places feminist hermeneutics in the business of bringing life through the Bible which contains both good news and bad news for wo/men. The feminist approach is not shy to point out both characters (good news and bad news) of the Bible as Christian literature nor is it defensive of the context in which such elements as bad news (for example patriarchy as an oppressive system) exists and originated from. It rather critiques the context and reconstructs it so that the good news character of biblical texts may take precedence and the intended theological implications of the Bible in faith communities can be cleansed from historical influences (exclusive interpretations excluding certain groups of people like women, and false interpretations based on limited readings of texts like we saw in the apartheid era) that have made the Bible into a book of exclusion rather than inclusion.

With some of the main implications of both a social-scientific reading and feminist hermeneutic reading now assessed, let's now turn our attention to the possibilities of life giving, transformative readings of biblical texts on the basis of these two methods as a combined effort to help Christians, living under the oppression of poverty, to make sense of not only the Bible in such a particular context but also make sense of Jesus Christ as liberator and saviour of the world, a world that seems to perpetuate poverty or is unable to alleviate poverty.

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<sup>52</sup> In 1991 Chung Hyun Kyung caused a lot of controversy when she used the image of Kwan Yin (an East Asian goddess of compassion and wisdom) as image for both the Holy Spirit and Christ in her address to the World Council of Churches with the theme "Come Holy Spirit-Renew the Whole Creation" (Muers 2008: 439-440).

From the outset this study has been of the opinion that sound interpretative methods can bring good news out of the Bible to Christians living in impoverished communities. The social-sciences in combination with feminist hermeneutics have been suggested as possible sound interpretative methods. Chapters three and four have showed the exegetical properties of these methods and in this chapter some implications of these methods have been illustrated. What follows now is a humble attempt at showing how the findings of both the exegesis and the implications might be applied to impoverished communities.

### **5.3 MOVING TOWARDS RELATIVE METHODS OF BRINGING FORTH GOOD NEWS FROM THE BIBLE**

One thing that both the social-sciences and feminist hermeneutics have showed in the analysis of Luke 1:39-56 and Luke 4:16-30 is that personal experiences of the characters in the text (even those not mentioned in the text but essentially part of the text, as feminist hermeneutics pointed out) play an important role. Thus for example Mary's song of praise is a reflection of her circumstances and her experience of honor and shame and patronage. So too Jesus' words in Luke 4:16-30 reflects his own understanding and familiarity with the oppressive character of the patron-client system and we see in the text how he actively engaged in the game of honor and shame and plays the game excellently in his challenge and riposte of the crowd at Nazareth. Furthermore feminist hermeneutics has helped us in seeing that both texts contains elements of the struggles of women of the time and brought to light their particular vulnerability in patriarchal societies such as the honor and shame society of the first century Mediterranean.

This leads to the conclusion that people and their experiences are at the center of biblical texts. Therefore this study suggests that in applying the social-sciences and feminist hermeneutics to reception history of the text (how people read and excepted biblical texts) the people that read the text together with their socio-political, economic and religious/spiritual context have to be placed at the center of the interpretative process. One therefore has to start from the experience of those reading the text (as feminist hermeneutics suggest). When reading the text in impoverished faith communities, ample attention must be given to the social reality of

Christians in those communities. The social-values and ideologies of the context must be understood before an evaluation of the biblical text begins.

In impoverished communities basic human needs take precedence over all other aspects of life and therefore a reading of biblical texts that seeks life-giving and transformative outcomes needs to address (or at the least be aware of) these basic human needs. Chapter three and four ( especially 3.3 and 4.2) critiqued the social systems like honor and shame, patronage and patriarchy. These social systems might not be as prominent in impoverished communities as in the first century Mediterranean but effects thereof can still be traced in poor communities (for example the subtle exploitation and deserting of the poor who are confined to their social status be the lack of proper education, insufficient exposure to social elevation, inability to own land and so forth). However there are also other social values at work in modern impoverished communities that need to be understood on its own terms in order to deal meaningfully with people from such a context (for example the economic values of an open market and the ability and restrictions of the poor entering into such a system).

### **5.3.1 What would liberation or transformation be for impoverished communities?**

Both pericopes dealt with in this study point towards transformation and/or liberation. Mary's song of praise in Luke 1:46-55 and Jesus' mission statement in Luke 4:18-19 not only leave the impression of hope but speaks of actual concrete changes to socio-political and economic circumstances. Both methods of interpretation employed in this study also point, and in the cases of feminist hermeneutics, aim at transformation in social structures that uphold dehumanizing systems. A considerate reading of biblical texts based on the methodologies of the social sciences and feminist hermeneutics must therefore insist that the transformative/liberating character of the text be embodied in the lives of those reading the text. In other words transformation and liberation need to be a consequential effect of reading the Bible through the lenses of the social-sciences in conjunction with feminist hermeneutics. I will admit that it takes a lot of work and that transformation/liberation of impoverished communities cannot be done as a theological endeavour on its own. Here biblical interpretation as a theological enterprise needs to take the hands of

other disciplines in order to bring about this consequential effect of reading the biblical text, but, in as far as the social-sciences and feminist hermeneutics are used as interpretative tools it must always be open to accommodate transformative and liberating effects on the communities where the text gets read as good news.

Having grown up in an impoverished community, and being exposed to other impoverished communities together with the effect that doing this study had on me as person and as exegete, I am of the opinion that a possible approach to transformation/liberation of impoverished communities (bringing forth good news from the Bible for Christians) as a consequence of reading the Bible through the lenses of the social-sciences and feminist hermeneutics, lies in community development as a partner of theology. Development seeks to narrow the gap that exists between privileged and under-privileged people. In chapters three and four of this study we saw how social systems like patronage divided the poor and the elite in terms of economic wellbeing and social status. Thus a considerate reading of biblical texts should not only point out social discrepancies (like those pointed out in 3.2.5) in the text but must also address contemporary social discrepancies (like the causes and effects of poverty). In my opinion Christian development will pay special attention to social values and world views in addressing poverty as a social ill and more importantly counter act the effects of poverty as the redemptive work of God.

I suggest that development must be understood in the light of what Stan Burkey calls development from below in his book *People first* (Burkey 1996: 35) as opposed to development from the top-down. The argument of development from below takes serious the experience and social reality of people, as do the methodologies of interpretation used in this study, and therefore has a clearer picture of how people can help themselves. Whereas a top-down approach starts from the perspective of policies and systems that impose upon people schemes that would probably be more detrimental than helpful.

### 5.3.2 An approach to development that focus' on people as a consequence of transformative/liberating reading of biblical texts

The exegesis done in chapters three (3.2) and four (4.1) suggests that texts are shaped and influenced by the social values of the time in which they originated. A sound understanding of the social values of biblical times helps the reader in placing the text in its proper context. Moreover the interpreter of the text can use this sound understanding of the social values of the text to draw parallels between his or her context and that of the text. He or she, in the light of the parallels drawn between the values of then and now, might want to use methods of interpretation to address the questions he or she comes with to the text. Therefore, as this study suggested, feminist hermeneutics can be used to address questions of inequality, oppression, liberation and transformation. Thus for example we saw in 4.2.1 that women and children were prominent amongst the vulnerable in the ancient Mediterranean world, due to the social values of that specific context. If one is to analyse and draw parallels between the Mediterranean and a context like impoverished communities in South-Africa, one would still find women and children as the most vulnerable in society.

Analysis and parallels should however not be the end of the process of interpretation. The parallels between different contexts and time should only serve as the basis, and one might say to affirm the biblical imperative of sound Christian values. However as indicated in chapters two, not all values were good or even Christian, therefore the critique thereof in chapters three and four.

A modern reader of the text can thus evaluate his or her own context in similar fashion and identify the social values that exploit and leaves vulnerable certain groups of people. The latter parts of chapters three and four argued for a transformative approach to biblical texts by using feminist hermeneutical lenses when reading the texts. At this stage of the interpretation process (after identifying social values both in the text and contemporary context, and seeking transformative ways of embodying biblical texts) we need to put into practice endeavours that can bring about transformation. What follows now is an exposition of development as a

possible tool of transformation and potential effect of reading and interpreting biblical texts through the lenses of a social-scientific approach and feminist hermeneutics:

Developments have had a complex history over the past 50 years (Kothari and Minogue 2001: 7) and some scholars like Uma Kothari and Martin Minogue assert that post World War II development has been a failure (Kothari and Minogue 2001: 2-3). One needs not to be as pessimistic as the mentioned scholars as there is to some extent elements of good offspring of development theories of the past, thus for example modernization brought the world technological advantages to such an extent that communication for both developed and underdeveloped countries have become easier. Furthermore as Ismail Davids points out that the theoretical approaches to development did not necessarily follow in sequence and that they sometimes overlap and “new” theories do not necessarily imply the relegation of existing development theories (Davids 2005:3) one can therefore argue that development made good contributions to life in general in the past 50 years. However a critical perspective on development and the different theories show that some discrepancies do exist in its fabric. Thus for example Wayne Bragg has identified the main flaws of the assumption of theories like: Modernism, Dependency and Underdevelopment, Global Reformism and Another Development and he suggests a transformational approach rather than development (Bragg 1987: 23-47).

Maybe the rationale for these discrepancies rests on the understanding and framework for development and its definitions.

“A good question in response to the above title [Linking Social Analysis With Curriculum Development: Insights From Paulo Freire] would be, are there or has there ever been any clear-cut parameters to the field of curriculum theory and development? A brief historical review of the curriculum field clearly reveals a multitude of perspectives and definitions” (Butkus 1989: 568).

Kothari and Minogue point out that Development is interdisciplinary social-science (economics, politics, sociology, anthropology, history [and may I add theology]) with the emphasis on theory full of paradoxes and that the agenda for development underwent serious changes in the last few years (Kothari and Minogue 2001: 1). It seems that these theoretical approaches have always been top-down orientated,



defining development from theoretical and macro-strategies forgetting that development is actually about people. Davids helps us to understand this concept by stating that development should first of all be for people and secondly by people (Davids 2005: 17) or what Stan Burkey (1996) in his book *People First* calls Development from Below. This notion of development being for and by people is analogous to the concept of a hermeneutic of remembrance which aims at the elimination of prevalent dominant groups which exploits other groups 3.3.1. A top down approach to development would form part of oppressive structures (like male dominant structures) and needs to be challenged (as showed in 4.2.1)

Burkey counters the notion that development cannot only take place from top-down. Burkey furthermore highlights the idea that rural people are affected by national and international policies over which they have no control or no say in but this does not mean that development cannot take place from micro levels like townships and villages (Burkey 1996:35). This notion caught on in the late 1980's which saw a shift from macro-level theoretical approaches to focuses on people and community which eventually resulted in People Centered Development. Advocates of this approach, defines people centered development as follows:

“... a process by which the members of a society increase their personal and institutional capacities to mobilize and manage resources to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their quality of life consistent with their own aspirations.” (Korten 1990: 76).

Burkey sees development in the light of this process as an process which gradually evolve over time due to the fact that “All people live within some form of social framework consisting of social, economic and political structures...[furthermore] Development will necessarily involve the use of physical, financial and human resources” (Burkey 1996:35). But where do you begin with this process?

### **5.3.3 Basic human needs and resources as transformation in impoverished communities**

It is the opinion of this study that in order for interpretative methods of biblical studies to be relevant and effective, there needs to be concrete consequences of interpretation. In other words without a practical aspect of the interpretation process,

the Bible will remain irrelevant in the lives of those who struggle under the oppressive reign of poverty and its related manifestations. Addressing the basic human needs through a sound form of development of those trapped in poverty is one way of putting into practice what the exegesis of chapters three and four of this study produced as a way forward.

“Development must... begin by identifying human needs. The object of development is to raise the level of living of the masses of the people and to provide all human beings with opportunity to develop their potential” (Wilber 1986: 30). These basic human needs can be divided into two groups namely, basic concrete needs and basic abstract needs. The concrete needs will include things that people cannot go without such as: food, water clothing and shelter. For Stan Burkey concrete needs also include things like: unpolluted air, physical and emotional security and physical and mental rest. Abstract needs are things such as self-confidence/dependence, happiness and human dignity and for Christians hearing and reading the Bible as good news. He further points out that:

“...the survival of the human race depends not on the survival of a single individual, but on the survival of communities. It is thus necessary to expand the list of basic individual needs to include those of a community. These might be defined as sexual regeneration, a system of communication (language), a belief and educational system...physical and cultural security, a political system...and systems of health and recreation...” (Burkey 1996: 3).

In 4.2.3 it has been urged that a critical analysis of the impact of social values like honor and shame needs to be done. In impoverished communities the honor or lack thereof can partly be evaluated in terms of that community's access to resources that covers their concrete and abstract needs. A community lacking the basic human needs thus can be described as a community in shame. The feminist hermeneutic of suspicion would call into question the social systems that perpetuate that community's lack to resources.

Concrete and abstract needs must be viewed in the same light. Should one try to separate the two the abstract needs will remain unfulfilled (Swanepoel and De Beer

2004: 24). Other scholars like Maslow have argued that one should understand the human needs in four hierarchical classes namely:

1. Physical needs
2. Safety needs
3. Need of belonging
4. Self-determination

According to Maslow's analysis; if the 'lower-order' needs are not met the 'higher-order' needs cannot be satisfied (Kok and Motloch 1992: 149-150). However scholars like Liebenberg and Theron argue that this kind of approach implies development actions that don't take into consideration the people, culture and politics of the context in which the development should take place. They suggest that Max-Neef's approach is more plausible. Max-Neef argues that basic human needs cannot be grouped into hierarchical structures and that culture cannot determine needs but rather the satisfiers of the needs (Liebenberg and Theron 1997: 123). These satisfiers consist out of a three dimensional nature namely: The Self, Social Group (a community formed around needs) and the Environment (area of habitation). This alludes to the integrated nature in which development should take place, meaning that although the person is at the centre of the approach, the developers and theorists should see the person holistic as person but also as person in his or her context and environment. One should therefore also give due acknowledgement to the complex nature of development based on the needs of people.

Here follows a table that illustrates the holistic nature of human needs. It shows the importance of looking at a person in totality and if one looks at impoverished communities, in relation to this table, it's easy to see the need of holistic development:

	<b>Being</b>	<b>Having</b>	<b>Doing</b>	<b>Interacting</b>
Subsistence	Physical health, mental health, equilibrium, [spirituality/religion] sense of humor, adaptability	Food, shelter, work	Feed, procreate, rest, work	Living environment, social setting

(Liebenberg and Theron 1997: 123).

The link between biblical interpretation as done in this study, development, Basic Human Needs and Resources is that development is the empowering process by which participants gain greater control, grounded in good Christian values, over their own lives as individuals and community. Development further should enable personal and institutional capacities of communities to use and manage resources towards meeting their basic needs and produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in the quality of life (Liebenberg and Theron 1997: 124). This once again renders the need to see development as a holistic process integrating various dimensions as facets of life. The well known illustration of 'Burkey's house' indicates the interrelated nature of development. He, Burkey, argues for a four dimensional interdependent nature of Human (personal), Economic, Political and Social development. (Burkey 1996: 35-39). Although not explicitly stated in Burkey's model, there is room for religious development or as I would suggest religion as catalyst and motivator for the interdependent growth and development. This interdependent process of development stresses the importance of participation, empowerment and sustainability.

One of the failures of 'older' development approaches has been that the people were not intimately involved in the decision making process which would eventually effect them as the supposed beneficiaries of development. This resulted in alien concepts being enforced upon the already suffering. This is the kind of social systems that

need reconstruction argued for in 4.2.2. A hermeneutic of remembrance must call to life and give a voice to people who have no say in process that will affect them.

The people-centered integrated approach based on basic human needs and resources calls for intimate and effective participation of the beneficiaries. "You must ensure that the poorest of the poor are present when decisions are made regarding development, and also that they participate actively" (Swanepoel and De Beer 2004: 26). This means that where as the developer used to be a manager and dictator he or she, now in this approach, needs to become a facilitator moving away from values of patronage to values of community and common good.

"Since its establishment as an interdisciplinary centre of research in the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University in 2001, the Unit for Religion and Development Research (URDR) has undertaken a number of research initiatives to mobilize the faith-based sector for social development action in local communities... in the Western Cape province, the defining feature of the Unit's research work has been the way in which it has consistently striven to engage members of the various communities as direct participants in the research through a participatory action research process." (Swart 2006: 354).

In terms of biblical interpretation it means that people have to engage with biblical texts amidst a clear focus on their social reality. A local example of this notion can be found in the work of Ignatius Swart 2006 *Churches As A Stock Of Social Capital For Promoting Social Development In Western Cape Communities*

Empowerment is closely related to Participation. As with participation, power was one of the things that the people on the ground did not have much in 'older' development approaches. Empowerment is an essential part of fulfilling the basic needs of people and maintaining honor as described in 3.2.6. It is through empowerment that people should be able to articulate what development means to them. Empowerment also has an effect on the decision making process, the beneficiaries ought to have input on how the available resources should be used and the development goals achieved (Swanepoel and De Beer 2004: 26). This empowerment (as argued in 4.2.3 in the hermeneutic of proclamation) takes place

through learning new skills ( and enhancing existing ones) learning from other people and accumulation of knowledge (Burkey 1996: 35).

Between people's participation and empowerment there is a complex relationship that gets explained in terms of sustainable development. Sustainable development stand at the centre of participation and empowerment and there are two dimensions of which one should take note. The first is that it deals with a continuous flow of benefits. "This ongoing flow of benefits and resources is a restricted process, especially in terms of the degradation of developmental, ecological and environmental resources" (Swanepoel and De Beer 2004: 26). This is a modern form of patronage and from the hermeneutic of suspicion as seen in 3.3.1.1 one must ask the critical question of who really benefits from this flow of benefits. Moreover it should be "non-decreasing over time" (Ibid). The second deals with time, time in the sense that sustainable development should be a long term process that should provide resources within a continuous spiral (Ibid).

In the light of the exegesis done on the two pericopes, and as a consequence of reading through the lenses of a social-scientific approach and feminist hermeneutics, one might want to look at local attempts at transformation as sustainable development.

In the South African context the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) is one of the people centered approaches that integrated socio-economic and political dimensions of life in general in post Apartheid South Africa.

"The central challenge to the RDP lies in achieving an improvement of life through meeting basic human needs and stimulating economic growth in a sustainable manner...an enormous portion of very basic needs are presently unmet' because of apartheid policies and the grossly skewed nature of business and industrial development in South Africa" (ANC 1994:14).

RDP has not been a total success because it used the 'traditional growth-centered approach' in defining human needs, and it is still stand in need of greater participation by communities and a wider scope of basic needs (Swanepoel and De Beer 2004: 129). In fact a reading through the lenses of a social-scientific approach

and feminist hermeneutics would characterise attempts like RDP as one based on a false perception of patronage. At the core of this programme, RDP, lies the political aspects of patronage and reciprocity that outweighs human needs and therefore it can be seen as failure.

#### **5.3.4 Some theological implications of an approach to development that focus' on people as consequence of a transformative/liberating reading of biblical texts**

Although development's origin is essentially secular (Sine 1987: 2) it does not mean that theology and the church cannot play a role in the evolving process of development. In fact this study sees secular influences as vital part of succeeding in considerate reading of biblical texts such as Luke 1:39-56 and Luke 4:16-30 as text that might possibly lead to alleviating practices in impoverished communities. A considerate reading of biblical texts through the lenses of the social-sciences and feminist hermeneutic as a theological enterprise of interpretation asks three questions in terms of developments:

- (1) What is the motivation for development?
- (2) What are its goals?
- (3) Which methods are used in implementing the goals? (Loffler 1970: 65).

If we evaluate the Integrated People Centered approach to development in the light of these questions, then we find that some elements of this approach complement these questions and the subsequent questions, while other elements do not and in fact contradict a theological/Christian approach to development. For example under question one, as stated above, theology subsequently asks about the political influence of motivation for development and the role the church can play in prophetically unmasking political hypocrisy (Loffler 1970: 66). In reaction to these questions one can argue (as we have seen from the exegetical work done in chapters three and four) that it is impossible to cut lose the community from the economic, social and political context in which it is rooted. This implies that there will be political motivation for development. However, as a feminist hermeneutical approach suggests, the motivation should be about people and their holistic development, thus politics can not be the sole motivation for development. In this

regard theology (through sound interpretative methods) plays the role of the watch dog seeing to it that development stays on track in terms of its motivations.

Loffler suggests that development points specifically to Biblical and theological traditions which can be divided into two groups namely: (1) Major theological themes and (2) Particular theological themes. Starting with the latter, these themes might include reconciliation in a world where the church cannot remain neutral but must have a holistic interest in mind. Or it can include the prophetic calling of the church in the light of power structures [such as the ones that feminist hermeneutic critiques] (Loffler 1970: 69-70). The major theological themes seem to be a better connection point of the evaluation of the people centered approach of development. The four major theological themes proposed by Loffler are:

- (1) Christology
- (2) Anthropology
- (3) Ecclesiology
- (4) Eschatology.

#### *5.3.4.1 Christology*

Development seeks to improve the living standards of people especially the poor. A social scientific approach in conjunction with feminist hermeneutics also aims at improved living standards of the poor as far as it is used as interpretative tools in impoverished Christian communities. A Christian theological approach to people centered integrated development (such as being promoted by this study through the integration of the social-sciences and feminist hermeneutics as interpretative methods and community development as application tool of these interpretative methods) would place Christ as the model for development on the grounds that Christ –the New Adam (Loffler 1970: 69) is the restorer of creation and the example through his life and works of the embodiment of the new creation.

The gospels tell us of the way that Jesus Christ interacted with people from different walks of life and how he went beyond the cultural boundaries in healing the



untouchables and eating with the sinners. Chapter four, especially 4.2.2, alludes to Jesus' understanding of and solidarity with women as the vulnerable of his time. In development this comes down to the fact that all people even those who are the poorest of the poor have to be empowered, a principle emphasized by the people centered approach as well as the exegesis of chapters three and four. Through Christ's works and ministry he empowered the outcasts of his time so that they can take back their rightful place in society by giving them back their human dignity (as stated in his mission statement of Luke 4: 16-30), one of the most important abstract needs of a human being.

#### *5.3.4.2 Anthropology*

In Christian anthropology the most important feature is the *imago Dei*. The person is in relation to God, which boils down to the fact that the people are relational beings. The person stands in relations to him/her self, other people, his or her context and the environment. A Christian anthropological approach to development would then affirm the three principles of people centered development namely: participation, empowerment and sustainability. We find a miscellany of these principles in both the pericopes dealt with in the exegesis of this study. Mary's confidence seen in her song of praise (Luke 1: 46-55) can be interpreted as an act of empowerment and carries undertones of economic sustainability as urged in 3.2.5 whilst an interpretation of the perception of limited good and honor indicates her active participation in her own context 3.2.7. In addition we can also regard Jesus' 'mission statement' (Luke 4:18-19) as empowering, promoting sustainability (as have been done through the hermeneutic of proclamation 4.2.3), and participatory (as illustrated in 4.2.4). Therefore, one can argue, there exists plausible justification in which Christian anthropological approaches to development and interpretation based on a social scientific approach and feminist hermeneutics balance each other in terms of principles of functionality.

### *5.3.4.3 Ecclesiology*

The church is part of the whole community and therefore essential to the process of development. "...the perspective on social trust has also been extreme to a wider debate on the strategic importance of the churches and the faith based sector in general as a agent of social development in post-apartheid South Africa" (Swart 2006: 347). The church has to be ecumenical if we think of development. Churches can learn from each other and can be much more effective of its ecumenical and not denominational. As church we must take serious what Jesus says in Luke 4:16-30 and give special attention to those mentioned in verses 18 and 19. The transformative character as advocated for by feminist hermeneutics thus becomes an essential part of how the church should define itself because we build on the foundation which is Christ.

### *5.3.4.4 Eschatological*

The eschatological aspects of development find affirmation in theology. The fact that a people centered integrated approach has as a pillar the sustainability of development, highlights the fact that in Christian terms a realized eschatology is at work in the understanding of the people involved. The fact that sustainable development calls for an ongoing spiral of resources and benefits, it underlines the fact that future generations are also taken into account. Sustainable development also includes an element of hope in as far as it makes people aware of the potential that they have to sustain themselves and the environment if the resources are treated and managed responsibly. People who feel that they have been intimately involved in the process of development must have hope to look at the future as potentially better off. The element of hope is prevalent in both pericopes we interpreted in the preceding chapters. Furthermore transformation, as has been argued for in chapters three and four, is pointless if not undergirded by hope. Luke 4:16-30 is a prime example of how Jesus establishes hope in the kingdom which his mission strives towards. Thus Jesus' mission is the basis of a theological perspective of eschatology which is based on the hope that Christians have in Christ, and therefore the future is not a scary place but here and not yet.

## 5.4 SUMMARY

In this chapter attempts have been made to correlate the findings of the preceding chapters showing some of the implications that the methodologies of the social-sciences and feminist hermeneutics might hold for reading biblical text through these lenses. Furthermore from the findings and exegesis on Luke 1:39-56 and Luke 4:16-30 it has been argued that people should in their social circumstances stand at the heart and center of the process of interpretation (which includes the process of how the text has and is being received by readers of the Bible). On that basis this study suggests that when trying to bring forth good news from the Bible in impoverished communities the basic needs of poor Christians should be given due attention. In applying the findings of this study in relation to impoverished communities I have argued for an integrated approach of the social-sciences and feminist hermeneutic as theological endeavour together with community development as not only consequence of transformative/liberating readings but also as concrete method of addressing the basic needs of poor people. The theological implications sets the proposed people centered development suggestion in the framework of a Christian approach towards poverty alleviation and points towards making the Bible relevant in impoverished communities bringing good news forth from the reading of biblical text in such communities.

The model of interpretation and application as recommended by this study is by no means set in stone and leans heavily upon an interdisciplinary approach to theology, it is also not to be seen as the proposed method that exhausted all possibilities of bringing together the social-sciences, feminist hermeneutics and development as elements of transformative readings of biblical text. It should rather be read as a humble attempt at making sense of biblical texts in a context that shaped the author of this study and seeking to bring out from the Bible meaningful insights that might possibly help Christians, who find themselves amidst the reality of poverty and all its related social elements, read the Bible with optimism that will hopefully lead to actions addressing the devastating effects of poverty.

## CHAPTER SIX

### 6.1 CONCLUSION

This study was born out of the question: how can the gospels be good news to people whose social sphere consists out of more bad news than good news? I presumed that there exists a problem in getting the good news of Jesus Christ across to Christians, especially those Christians in impoverished communities. It is the opinion of this study that part of the problem of getting the good news across to modern Christians, living in poverty, is method.

The premise of this thesis is that, in order to address the needs of modern readers (including and especially the poor) of the Bible, there need to be methodological approaches that allow the interpreters and practitioners of the Bible to engage with the text at root levels and social location of the faith community in which they read the Bible. It is the opinion of this study that one possible approach to this contextual reading of the Bible is to apply a social scientific approach in combination with feminist hermeneutics as methodological approach.

Throughout this thesis, therefore, the focus has been on the social sciences and feminist hermeneutics as possible approaches to read the Bible in a transformative way. I opted to work with Luke 1:39-56 and 4:16-30 as pericopes to illustrate how this methodological approach can be implemented. In chapter two I set out to place the chosen texts in their socio-historical context by an investigation into the social values of the ancient Mediterranean world of the first century AD. In that chapter it was found that honor and shame were the basis for all other values of the time and that every action had to be measured against the honor that can be gained or loss. I also argued that modern readers of biblical texts read the text as outsiders and that one needs to have a sound understanding of these values in order to understand the text.

In chapter three I started to appropriate the knowledge of the social values to a process of exegesis done on Luke 1:39-56. The aim of chapter three was to see how the text got influenced and shaped by social values as those identified in chapter two. This chapter (three) also started to look at the implications of the proposed

reading of the selected texts based on the hermeneutics of the social sciences and that of feminist theology.

The exegetical work done on chapter three suggested that values such as kinship, gender roles in society, patronage, and honor and shame is at work in Luke 1:39-56. This study suggested that the implied author of this text presumed certain things that his audience would have taken for granted (for example: the restriction on women to be publicly speaking 3.2.2 and economic benefits of patronage 3.2.5, just to name a few), but that can be alien to a modern reader of the text. Therefore modern readers need to read through the hermeneutical lenses of methods like the social sciences to get a clearer picture of what the text contains in its words as well as its silence.

The latter part of chapter three concentrated on a feminist hermeneutical model suggested by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. This model is a four dimensional representation that seek to expose negative androcentric influences on biblical texts and the reader, and to recover the history and struggles of vulnerable characters of the texts particularly women. The ultimate aim of her model of interpretation is to read the text as transformative, life-giving texts for both women and men. This study also aims at a transformative, life-giving reading of biblical texts through appropriate models of interpretation. Schüssler Fiorenza's hermeneutical model has the reader start with a hermeneutic of suspicion that deconstructs all negative effects of patriarchal and androcentric systems that relegates the history and worth of women and vulnerable people. The second leg of her model is called the hermeneutic of remembrance which should be used to recall the particular struggles of women in the text. Thirdly she makes use of a hermeneutic of proclamation which refuses to proclaim oppressive elements of the text as the word of God. This part of the hermeneutical process, as suggested by Schüssler Fiorenza, also has to bring forth the hidden facts of the reality of women in the text, and the possibilities of good news to the marginalised should also find expression in this part of the process. The last dimension of the Schüssler Fiorenza's model is called a hermeneutic of creative actualisation. This part of the interpretation seeks to reconstruct texts into acts that would embody transformation and affirm the value of the marginalised, particularly women.

Chapter four took the same form as chapter three and formed part of the exegetical section of this study. Whereas chapter three concentrated on Luke 1: 39-56 as premise for the exegetical work, chapter four made use of Luke 4: 16-30 as basis and pericope of the exegetical work. Chapter four, like chapter three, was divided into a social scientific reading of the text and a feminist hermeneutic reading of the text.

The latter part of chapter four continued in the steps of the previous chapter by making use of Schüssler Fiorenza's four-dimensional hermeneutical model to Luke 4: 16-30. At the last leg of her model, applied to Luke 4:16-30, I reconstructed the text by a retelling of the rejection of Jesus at Nazareth through the eyes of a reconstruction of a first century AD Mediterranean woman. Chapter four thus followed the same pattern as chapter three and comprise of the exegesis of this study.

In chapter five I set out to correlate the findings and suggestions in the preceding chapters of this study. In this chapter I also began to explore the theoretical possibilities of emancipated readings of biblical texts as a result of social scientific approaches in correlation with feminist hermeneutics. It was found during the exegesis that both feminist hermeneutics and a social scientific approach, to biblical interpretation, take very serious the personal experiences of characters in the text (even those not explicitly mentioned in the text but essentially part of the text as feminist hermeneutics showed). This lead to the conclusion that people and their experience are at the center of biblical texts. This study therefore suggested that the function of the social sciences and feminist hermeneutics as interpretative models must direct the reader to place him or herself at the center of the text. This means that when reading biblical texts in impoverished communities, ample attention must be given to the social realities of Christians in that context.

Furthermore the exegesis suggested transformation as an effect of reading biblical texts through the lenses of social sciences and feminist hermeneutics. This study then suggested that as out flow of the interpretation process and as effect of a considerate reading of the selected texts of this study, that community development would be a good complement to such a considerate reading.

I therefore suggested Christian community development with a specific approach that would start with the experiences of the poor in endeavours of development and transformation. Chapter five has given specific attention to the implication of basic human needs as principle for development and transformation.

My concern is with interpretation of biblical texts in sound, affirmative and transformative manners. I found the social-sciences and feminist hermeneutics very helpful in this regard, and an approach to development focusing on people and their experience, as a plausible consequence of such an approach to biblical texts. "In the final analysis, it is the transformative power of God's love which precedes and exceeds all our hermeneutical endeavours- even our most imaginative ones" (Mouton 1995: 248). It is that love of God that we see at work in Jesus Christ who once said:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour...today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:18-19; 21b NRSV).

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