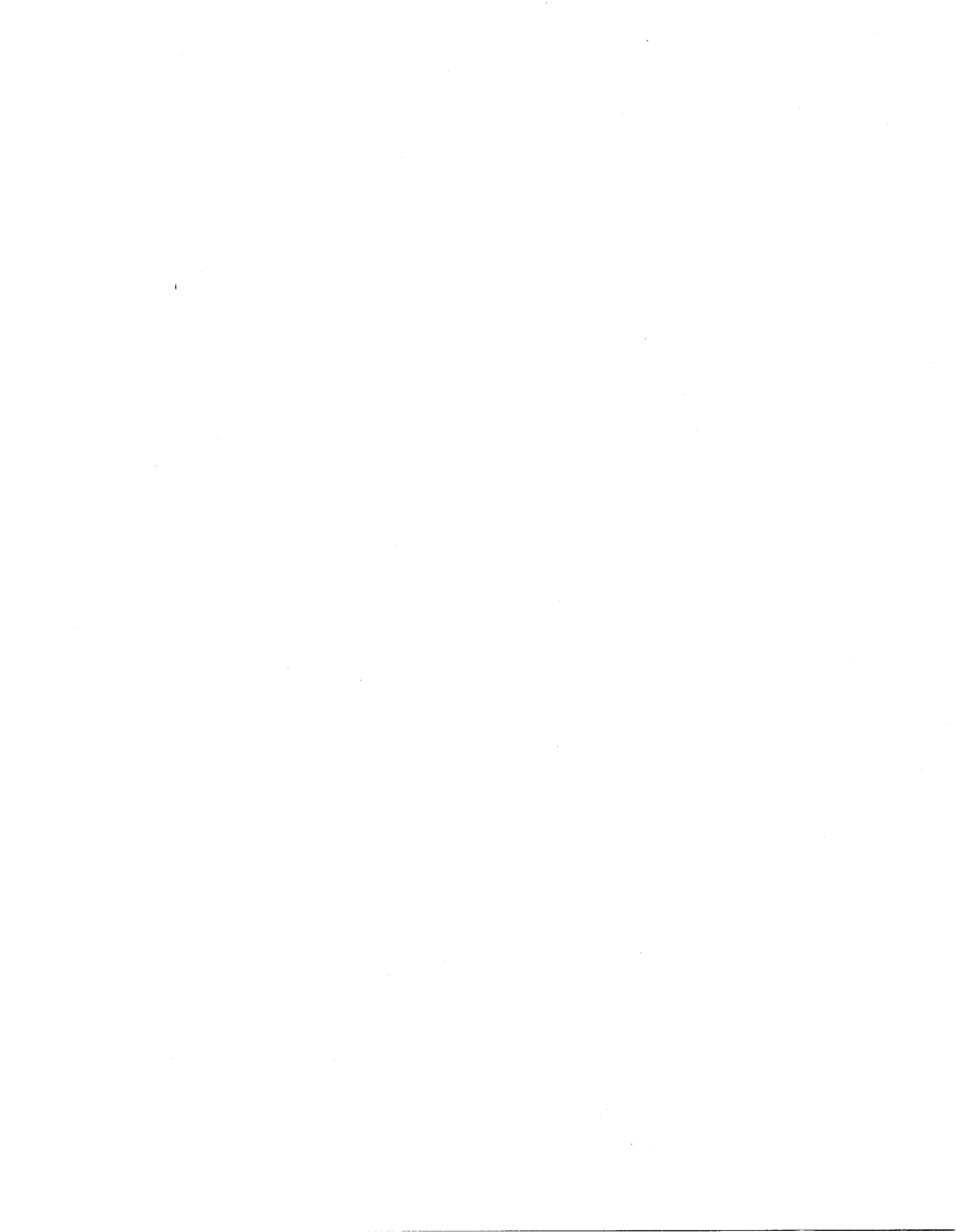


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AN EVANGELICAL ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE
OF FEMINIST CHRISTOLOGY

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Micah Daniel Carter
December 2008

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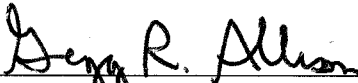
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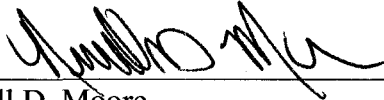
**AN EVANGELICAL ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE
OF FEMINIST CHRISTOLOGY**

Micah Daniel Carter

Read and Approved by:



Gregg R. Allison (Chairman)



Russell D. Moore



Stephen J. Wellum

Date 10-6-08

To Meredith, Ben, and Jon,

who fill my life with

love and laughter

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	viii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Thesis	3
Background	10
Research Methodology	15
Conclusion	18
2. FEMINIST THEOLOGICAL METHOD AND CHRISTOLOGY	19
Introduction	19
Lack of Unanimity in Feminist Theological Method	21
Theological Starting Point: Women's Experience	23
Sources and Norms	28
Women's Experience	29
Scripture and Tradition	31
History and Reality	39
Fundamental Principle: Overcoming Patriarchy and Androcentrism	42
The Problem and Promise of Jesus for Feminist Theology	45
Conclusion	47

Chapter	Page
3. ASSESSING THE PERSON OF CHRIST IN FEMINIST THEOLOGY . .	52
Introduction	52
Feminist Arguments Against the Maleness of Jesus	55
A Tool for the Subordination of Women	56
Inadequate Metaphor/Symbol	59
Jeopardy of Women’s Salvation	62
Maleness as an Irrelevant Particularity	64
Feminist Alternatives for an “Inclusive” Christology	66
Jesus as Iconoclastic Prophet	66
Envisioning Christ as Female or Androgynous	68
Relocation of Christ to the Community	71
Jesus as Incarnation of Female Deity	74
Evaluation and Critique	79
Answering Feminist Anthropological Concerns	79
Answering Feminist Soteriological Concerns	81
Answering Feminist Theological Concerns	86
Faulty Starting Point: Women’s Experience	88
Loss of Textual Approach	90
Conclusion	95
4. ASSESSING THE WORK OF CHRIST IN FEMINIST THEOLOGY	98
Introduction	98

Chapter	Page
Feminist Rejection of Traditional Atonement Theology as “Divine Child Abuse”	100
Feminist Assessment of Classical Atonement Theories	101
Feminist Perspectives for Understanding Atonement	105
Atonement as God’s Suffering Solidarity with Humanity	108
Atonement and the Marks of Sexual Difference	109
Atonement Itself Questioned and Rejected	111
The Practical Implication of Classical Atonement Theology: The Acceptance and Perpetuation of Abuse and Violence	112
Answering the Feminist Critique of Atonement Theology	115
The Nature of God in Classical Atonement Theories	115
Addressing Feminist Soteriology, Christology, and Theology Proper	121
Answering Feminist Practical Implications of the Cross: Does Classical Atonement Theology Beget Abuse?	138
Conclusion	143
5. ASSESSING THE INFLUENCE OF FEMINIST CHRISTOLOGY IN EVANGELICALISM	145
Introduction	145
Increasing Affinity for Feminist Criticisms Among Evangelicals	146
Rejection of Patriarchy	148
Revisions in the Doctrine of God	159
Revisions in the Doctrines of Scripture and Ecclesiology	171
Emerging Evangelical Revisions in Christology	178

Chapter	Page
Growing Resistance to the Particularity and Necessity of Christ’s Maleness	181
Growing Rejection of Penal Substitutionary Atonement	189
Conclusion	200
6. CONCLUSION	201
Summary of Feminist Christology	202
Evangelical Response(s) to Feminist Christology	206
Recommendations for Further Study	209
Final Reflections	210
BIBLIOGRAPHY	212

PREFACE

As the capstone of my doctoral studies, the process of research and writing this dissertation has challenged me and shaped me in innumerable ways. Similarly, the process of doctoral studies has afforded me many great opportunities and experiences, especially the joy and privilege to study with an excellent, world-class theology faculty. My dissertation committee—Gregg Allison, Russell Moore, and Stephen Wellum—provided ample encouragement, critical insight, and valuable feedback throughout the entire research and writing process. I am particularly indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Allison, for his sharp eye, keen mind, and warm heart. I am proud not only to be mentored through my theological studies by these men, but also to call them friends.

Several churches have given me tremendous encouragement and support. Each has been fertile soil for me to learn and apply the content of Christian theology: Doty Chapel Baptist Church (Shannon, Mississippi), Hunsinger Lane Baptist Church (Louisville, Kentucky), and Mackville Baptist Church (Mackville, Kentucky). I love the dear communities of believers that comprise these churches, and I will forever be grateful for their prayers, love, patience, and encouragement that have prodded me along to completion.

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Cross, Kevin and Kelly Rinehart, Paul and Kerry Bruce, Adam and Carla Greenway, Charlie and Mendy Davis, and Jarvis Williams have shared life with me and sharpened me to be a better husband, father, pastor, and student. My life would be strangely deficient without these irreplaceable friends.

My family has also been an unending source of encouragement and prayer throughout the entire process of my theological education, and for this they deserve much appreciation and many thanks. I owe a significant debt of love to Dan and Cynthia (Valaile) Carter, Ray and Maxine Carter, Anna Ross, Donald and Ouida (Phillips) Roten, Pearl and Cora Roten, Lila Phillips, Stephanie Carter, Daniel Lawler Jr., Perrin and Ashley Roten, Ron Phillips, Steve and Diane Anderson, and Danny and Katie Anderson. What a cherished blessing to be a part of this wonderful family!

But I have saved the best until last. Words fail to express the appreciation and love I have for my wife, Meredith. She has sacrificed entirely too much time and attention in this endeavor, but at the same time she has been selfless and positive to the end. Even more, she has blessed me with her sharp editorial skill and thought-provoking questions. She has endured seasons of stress and doubt, joy and excitement, confusion and clarity, and of course, my many theological ruminations, rantings, and ravings. Undoubtedly, her love, encouragement, laughter, prayers, hope, and patience have been my source of comfort and determination to finish well. Our sons, Benjamin and Jonathan, also deserve praise and gratitude—not just for their patience with Daddy’s writing, but also for their much needed “interruptions” that brought me levity and laughter. With these things in mind, this dissertation is dedicated to my precious little family—Meredith, Ben, and Jon.

Finally, I pray that Paul's conviction and humility in 1 Corinthians 2:2 is evident also in this endeavor: "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." May Jesus receive all the glory and honor (Rev 5:9-14), so that in all things he alone might be preeminent (Col 1:18)!

Micah Daniel Carter

Mackville, Kentucky

December 2008

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The study of the person and work of Christ is at the very heart of Christian theology.¹ In the history of the Church, analyzing the person and work of Jesus Christ provoked intensely heated theological debates among the early Fathers, as well as a galvanizing of the core beliefs and doctrines of our faith that separated the heretics from the orthodox.² Although the orthodox beliefs about Christ that culminated in the Council of Chalcedon have not been without criticism historically, the contemporary theological landscape entertains widespread criticisms of and revisions to classical Christology.

One such stream of criticism and revision in Christology comes through feminist theologians.³ As feminist theologians reflect on the person of Christ in light of

¹Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 678.

²G. C. Berkouwer, *The Person of Christ*, Studies in Dogmatics Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 59-71.

³The term “feminist” is a convenient generalization for the perspective analyzed in this dissertation. There are, however, various streams of thought within the feminist movement. H. M. Conn helpfully categorizes feminist thinkers into three categories: (1) radical (post-Christian/secular), (2) reformist (religious/biblical), and (3) loyalist (evangelical); see H. M. Conn, “Feminist Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 255. I will focus on reformist or religious feminist contributions, but will point out the other categorizations where it is relevant to the argument or purpose under consideration. For additional reference, see Rebecca S. Chopp, “Feminist and Womanist Theologies,” in *The Modern Theologians*, ed. David F. Ford, 2nd ed. (Malden,

their gendered experience, new insights and theological explorations into the meaning of Jesus Christ for the lives of twenty-first century women and men have emerged.⁴ In Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen's estimation, the questions posed by some feminist theologians with regard to the person of Christ are illuminating: How can a "Son of God" be a Savior and representative of God's sons *and daughters*? How does Jesus' "maleness" relate to the other half of humankind? Is God the Son masculine or feminine or beyond?⁵

Feminist theologians contend that just as Christ's person poses problems for twenty-first century women, Christ's work is equally as troubling, if not more so. Feminists assert that the work of Christ, as articulated in the classical theories of the atonement, demonstrates "divine child abuse."⁶ At the heart of feminist disdain for classical atonement theories, however, is the allegation that the cross sanctions and perpetuates domestic violence and abuse. Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker argue that it is the "image of God the father demanding and carrying out the suffering and death of his own son [which] has sustained a culture of abuse and led to the abandonment of victims of abuse and oppression."⁷

MA: Blackwell, 1997): 389-404; and Ann Loades, "Feminist Theology," in *The Modern Theologians*, ed. David F. Ford, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997): 575-84.

⁴Ellen Leonard, "Women and Christ: Toward Inclusive Christologies," in *Constructive Christian Theology in the Worldwide Church*, ed. William R. Barr (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 325.

⁵Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Christology: A Global Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 197.

⁶Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn, eds., *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1989). See also Joanne Carlson Brown, "Divine Child Abuse?" *Daughters of Sarah* 18 (1992): 24-28.

⁷Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, "For God So Loved the World?" in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse*, ed. Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn

Such criticisms and arguments from feminist theologians related to Christ's person and work have led to significant reconstructions of *who* Christ was and is, as well as *what* he actually accomplished on the cross. These reconstructions call for careful attention, analysis, and critique, particularly because they are gaining a serious hearing among evangelicals.

Thesis

This dissertation argues that radical and reformist feminist Christological explorations and proposals demonstrate a clear rejection of biblical, classical (i.e., patriarchal) Christology, and as a result are unacceptable for evangelical Christological formulation.⁸ In the following, I will address each aspect of this thesis.

There is, as yet, no universally agreed *feminist Christology*, at least one that addresses *all* of the critiques leveled at traditional Christology from feminist theologians. What is available, however, are a number of explorative possibilities that seek to reconstruct Christology in terms of more inclusive feminist perspectives.⁹ Feminist

(Cleveland: Pilgrim), 9.

⁸For various perspectives on the debate over evangelical definitional boundaries, see Alister E. McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995); R. Albert Mohler Jr., "'Evangelical': What's in a Name?" in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis: Current Challenges to the Authority of Scripture and the Gospel*, ed. John H. Armstrong (Chicago: Moody, 1996), 29-44; Millard J. Erickson, *The Evangelical Left: Encountering Postconservative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997); Roger E. Olson, "Reforming Evangelical Theology," in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 201-08; David W. Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005); and Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006).

⁹Colin J. D. Greene, *Christology in Cultural Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 236.

theologians have labored to revise traditional Christology in a way that is “consonant with their own experience and [that] embraces the perceptions, values, aspirations and embodiedness of what it means to be a female in today’s world.”¹⁰ Broadly speaking, feminist Christology shares with modern Christology a preference for constructing a “Christology from below,” prioritizing human experience and perspective in Christological formulation.¹¹

The feminist proposals considered in this dissertation are not complete Christologies; rather, they attempt to re-image Jesus Christ in ways that take women’s experiences seriously. Each of the proposals seeks to “make room for the female within the male image.”¹² The underlying impetus for some feminist Christological reconstructions is largely due to the notion that Jesus may need women to redeem him, freeing him from the chains of male arrogance and patriarchal abuses.¹³

Feminist explorations and reconstructions in Christology consist of significant theological shifts in understanding Christ’s person and work, demonstrating a clear rejection of biblical, classical Christology. Related to Christ’s person, feminists re-image

¹⁰Ibid., 239.

¹¹“Christology from above” is reflected in the basic strategy and orientation of the Christological formulation of the early church, which assumed the historical reliability of the whole of Scripture and grounded Christology in divine revelation. “Christology from below,” in contrast, operates from a historical-critical methodology along with the prioritization of human experience (above the Bible’s own categories and structures) in theological formulation. See Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 679-91, although Erickson understands the differences between Christology from “above” and “below” in terms of starting with Jesus’ divinity or his humanity, respectively.

¹²Leonard, “Women and Christ,” 334.

¹³Lisa Isherwood, *Introducing Feminist Christologies* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2002), 24-25.

Jesus in several distinct forms. First, Jesus is perceived as merely an iconoclastic prophet speaking out against injustice and oppression, particularly the oppression of women.¹⁴ Second, Jesus is considered to be actually genetically female (although he appeared to be male), assuming the viability of the virgin birth.¹⁵ Third, Jesus is eclipsed by the Christian community, which becomes the authoritative center of feminist Christian faith, the locus of redemption, and the continuing identity of Christ encapsulated in “Christa/Community.”¹⁶ Finally, Jesus is understood to be the incarnation of feminine divinity, namely “Sophia.” This last proposal is probably the most substantive offered by religious feminists who seek to retain biblical language and data for Christological formulation.¹⁷

¹⁴Rosemary Radford Ruether, *To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981). See also her more recent contribution on this proposal: idem, “Can Christology Be Liberated From Patriarchy?” in *Reconstructing the Christ Symbol*, ed. Maryanne Stevens (New York: Paulist, 1993).

¹⁵Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Nancy A. Hardesty, *All We’re Meant to Be: Biblical Feminism for Today*, 3rd rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992). Scanzoni and Hardesty appeal to a medical and scientific study for their proposal: Edward L. Kessel, “A Proposed Biological Interpretation of the Virgin Birth,” *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 35 (1983): 129-36.

¹⁶Rita Nakashima Brock, “The Feminist Redemption of Christ,” in *Christian Feminism: Visions of a New Humanity*, ed. Judith L. Weidman (New York: Harper & Row, 1984). See also Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon, 1993), 135.

¹⁷Kathryn Greene-McCreight, *Feminist Reconstructions of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 86-87, traces the development and inclusion of Sophia on the popular and academic levels. See also Gail Paterson Corrington, *Her Image of Salvation: Female Saviors and Formative Christianity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992); Elizabeth A. Johnson, “Wisdom Was Made Flesh and Pitched Her Tent among Us,” in *Reconstructing the Christ Symbol*, ed. Maryanne Stevens (New York: Paulist, 1993), 95-117; and idem, “Jesus, the Wisdom of God: A Biblical Basis for a Non-Androcentric Christology,” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovaniensis* 61 (1985): 261-94.

Related to the work of Christ, feminists contend that the cross is a untenable act of violence that exalts suffering, bloodshed, and death. As such, the atonement is derided as “abusive,” “sadistic,” and “necrophilic.”¹⁸ How do feminist theologians consequently perceive the atonement? First, as a minority view, the atonement itself is called into question. Carlson Brown asserts, “We must do away with the atonement, this idea of a blood sin upon the whole human race which can be washed away only by the blood of the lamb. This blood-thirsty God is the God of patriarchy who at the moment controls the whole Christian tradition. We do not need to be saved by Jesus’ death from some original sin. We need to be liberated from this abusive patriarchy.”¹⁹

A second perspective on the atonement is much more common among feminists. Atonement has nothing to do with absolving the sins of the world, but rather demonstrates the concordant suffering of God and man. Carter Heyward, a self-avowed lesbian feminist theologian, affirms atonement as God’s solidarity with suffering humanity, stating, “We need to say no to a tradition of violent punishment and to a God who would crucify us—much less an innocent brother in our place—rather than hang with us, struggle with us, wait with us, and grieve with us.”²⁰

This dissertation’s contention is that feminist Christological explorations and proposals demonstrate a clear rejection of biblical, classical (i.e., patriarchal) Christology.

¹⁸Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon, 1978), 59.

¹⁹Carlson Brown, “Divine Child Abuse?” 28.

²⁰Carter Heyward, *Saving Jesus from Those Who Are Right: Rethinking What It Means to Be Christian* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 175. See also Elizabeth A. Johnson, “Redeeming the Name of Christ,” in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 115-37.

As feminist theologians reconstruct Christology in light of their gendered experiences, the Bible's own categories and nomenclature are rejected, especially the patriarchal vision of the text. *Biblical patriarchy*—the archetypal Fatherhood of God reflected in the leadership of human fathers—is essential to understanding Christology, because God is the *Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:28; 1 Pet 1:3). The great drama of redemption from Genesis onward anticipates the “seed” of the woman who will crush the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15); this seed is designated as our mediator, the “man” Jesus Christ (1 Tim 2:5; Gal 3:15-29). Further, the deliverance of Yahweh's son Israel from bondage in Egypt, the promise of a Davidic son to whom God would be a father (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 89:26), and the “Abba” cry of the new covenant assembly (Rom 8:15)—and all of these examples essentially dependent upon a patriarchal worldview—find fulfillment in Jesus Christ.²¹ Thus, the patriarchal storyline of Scripture is essential to Christology.

Explorations and revisions in feminist Christological formulation arise from a unified rejection of patriarchy. Patriarchy—the primacy of the father in the family and in society—is troublesome according to feminist theologians because patriarchal societies continue to foster the suppression and abuse of women, children, and the oppressed. Rita Nakashima Brock asserts, “I believe that patriarchy is the encompassing social system that sanctions child abuse. Theologically, the patriarchal family has been and continues to be a cornerstone for Christological doctrines, especially in father-son imagery and in unquestioned acceptance of benign paternalism as the norm for divine power,”²² and for

²¹Russell D. Moore, “After Patriarchy, What? Why Egalitarians Are Winning the Gender Debate,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49 (2006): 575.

²²Rita Nakashima Brock, “And a Little Child Will Lead Us: Christology and Child Abuse,” in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse*, ed. Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1989), 42.

this reason patriarchy must be abandoned and discarded as a pathetic relic of past cultural and societal perversity.²³

All religious feminists agree that the Bible upholds patriarchy, but their use and appreciation of the Bible for theological reflection and formulation is by no means unanimous. Radical or secular feminists concluded long ago that the Bible is irredeemably patriarchal and consequently reject the Bible and the God revealed therein.²⁴ Others, classified as reformist or religious feminists, argue that although the Bible is a thoroughly patriarchal document, there is an internal, prophetic critique within the Scriptures that stands against the patriarchal worldview reflected in the text.²⁵ Evangelical feminists are closely aligned to this perspective as well, particularly in their acceptance and defense of a “trajectory hermeneutic,” which claims that the important message of the Bible is where it is heading (toward egalitarianism), moving beyond what

²³On the contrary, sociologists and clinicians report that conservative Protestants who hold a patriarchal worldview are actually *less* likely to be abusive. See W. Bradford Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Robert Woodberry and Christian Smith, “Fundamentalism et al.: Conservative Protestants in America,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 25-56; John P. Bartowski, “Debating Patriarchy: Discursive Disputes Over Spousal Authority among Evangelical Family Commentators,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36 (1997): 393-410; and David A. Gay, Christopher G. Ellison, and Daniel A. Powers, “In Search of Denominational Subcultures: Religious Affiliation and ‘Pro-Family’ Issues Revisited,” *Review of Religious Research* 38, no. 1 (1996): 3-17.

²⁴E.g., Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1973). Such radical or secular feminism is beyond the scope of this dissertation, although particular arguments will be included throughout.

²⁵Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Feminism and Patriarchal Religion: Principles of Ideological Critique of the Bible,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 22 (1982): 54-66. Note also the significant contributions of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Letty Russell, and Phyllis Trible here on this point, cited in the bibliography.

it says.²⁶ In contrast to these proposals, classical Christology accepts the patriarchal vision of the Bible as essential to properly understanding Christ's person and work.

This dissertation argues that the Christological explorations and proposals from feminist theologians are unacceptable for *evangelical* Christological formulation. Evangelical theology draws its basic substance and identity from the heritage of orthodox Christian theology—from the creeds of the early church through the theological emphases of the Reformation (such as *sola Scriptura*, or the centrality and authority of Scripture) up to the contemporary rejection of theological liberalism.²⁷ In spite of these distinctives and commitments, some evangelicals are imbibing feminist Christological criticisms, receiving approvingly the feminist criticisms of traditional atonement theology,²⁸ and even questioning whether or not it was necessary for our Savior to be a man, concluding that his “maleness” has no Christological significance. Thus, evangelicals who incorporate these ideas into their Christology are betraying their doctrinal foundations.

The fruit of feminist criticisms and reconstructions of classical Christology is nothing less than recreating Christ in one's own image, instead of allowing the biblical

²⁶This position is defined and defended in David L. Thompson, “Women, Men, Slaves, and the Bible: Hermeneutical Inquiries,” *Christian Scholar's Review* 25 (1996): 326-49. See also William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001); and John G. Stackhouse Jr., *Finally Feminist: A Pragmatic Christian Understanding of Gender* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005).

²⁷See I. S. Rennie, “Evangelical Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 239-40.

²⁸Perhaps the clearest agreement between egalitarians and feminists on this point relates especially to the *penal substitutionary* understanding of the atonement. See Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000).

data to define sufficiently who Jesus is and what he has done for humanity. Outright rejection of *patriarchy* (particularly *biblical patriarchy*) suffers the loss of the storyline of Scripture, complementarian evangelicals argue, and as a result, Christ's person and work cannot rightly be understood. Christ thus takes on different, inappropriate forms at the hands of religious feminists—forms that fit nicely into an emasculated vision of Christian theology and praxis called for by feminists.²⁹ Further, the cross of Christ is emptied of its meaning and power when conceived apart from the patriarchal storyline of Scripture, something feminist theologians are all too eager to embrace.

Background

The genesis of my interest in feminist Christology began during my Master of Divinity studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Although I did not pursue serious research or writing projects on this topic, I became increasingly aware of feminist challenges to and critiques of orthodox Christian beliefs. My knowledge of feminist Christology during this initial stage of interest was marginal only, but I desired further opportunity to investigate feminist claims about the person and work of Christ.

One such opportunity came as I applied for doctoral studies at Southern Seminary. Aside from preparation for the required field essay in Systematic Theology, I read Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker's *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*.³⁰ As I read their assessment and rejection of penal substitution, I noticed that the basis for their

²⁹Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Will to Choose or Reject: Continuing Our Critical Work," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 126. See also Fiorenza's critical work, *Discipleship of Equals* (New York: Crossroad, 1993).

³⁰The full reference information for this book is found in n. 27.

response was rooted almost completely in feminist theology. The issue that disturbed me the most about Green and Baker's book was not its vitriolic disdain for penal substitution, but that *evangelicals* (at least Green) were appealing to feminist arguments to support their work. They state, ". . . We want to suggest that feminist criticisms of atonement theology help admirably to focus important issues that need further reflection."³¹

Although my interest in feminist Christology is broader than just atonement theology, Green and Baker's work is the singular impetus for my pursuance of understanding and critiquing feminist Christology.

Upon acceptance for doctoral studies, I sought to develop a program for research and writing in my seminars that would eventually bear fruit into a dissertation-length project. My first theology seminar with R. Albert Mohler Jr., "Contemporary Theological Methodologies," covered the loci of theological method. I chose to pursue as a research project the theological methodology of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, a well-known and prolific scholar in New Testament interpretation and hermeneutics at Harvard Divinity School. She is also a pioneer in feminist studies and feminist theology, offering significant monographs that undergird much feminist discourse.³² In my estimation, Fiorenza was an adequate representative through which to introduce myself to feminist theological discourse. As a result, Fiorenza's work fueled a greater desire for engagement with feminist theology.³³

³¹Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 89.

³²E.g., Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroad, 1983); idem, *But She Said* (Boston: Beacon, 1992); and idem, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet* (New York: Continuum, 1994).

³³My research for Fiorenza's theological methodology also yielded investigation into other feminist contributions to theological method, such as Mary Daly,

The following semester, my theology seminar “Theology Proper” with Stephen Wellum, allowed for an in-depth exploration on my part of the nature of God in feminist atonement theology. My research paper wrestled with the feminist allegation that classical atonement theories present the cross as divine child abuse, according to which spousal and child abuse are grounded in the classical doctrine of God. I later developed this paper into a presentation at the 2005 Southeast Regional Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Louisville, Kentucky. My presentation of this paper, both in Professor Wellum’s seminar and at the ETS regional meeting, allowed me to sharpen my focus of critical issues involved with feminist Christology.

In my next theology seminar on “Soteriology” with Chad Brand, I expanded my research to develop a paper entitled “An Evangelical Response to the Feminist Critique of Atonement Theology.” The motivation for this project was to investigate the influence of feminist arguments and critiques within evangelicalism. I discovered that many evangelicals, like the aforementioned Joel Green, actually welcome and embrace feminist criticisms of atonement theology, particularly as they relate to penal substitution. For example, Colin Greene writes, “Both feminist and liberationist christologies are a welcome and important development within the christological tradition.”³⁴ Evangelicals who consider themselves as *egalitarians* most readily accept feminist criticisms, as seen through their assimilation of feminist claims in other loci of evangelical theology.³⁵

Pamela Dickey Young, Anne Carr, and Rosemary Radford Ruether, among others. Each of these feminist thinkers has representative works listed in the bibliography.

³⁴Greene, *Christology in Cultural Perspective*, 245.

³⁵Evangelical egalitarians demonstrate this assertion in Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, eds., *Discovering Biblical Equality* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005). Feminist theology informs egalitarian theological claims related to

In my final semester of coursework, my remaining theology seminar was “Christology and Incarnation” with Professor Wellum. Since the subject matter of this seminar related to the person of Christ, I chose to investigate the feminist critique of the “maleness” of Christ. The majority of my research up to this final seminar focused almost entirely upon the work of Christ, so the research project for Professor Wellum was an opportunity to broaden my understanding of the wider context of feminist Christology. The research confirmed my primary suspicion about evangelical egalitarians that correlates to the thesis of this dissertation: evangelical egalitarians are questioning and revising critical Christological beliefs as a direct result of their sustained interest in, and acceptance of, feminist criticisms against orthodox theological claims.

I believe that this area of research is crucial for two reasons. First, there has not been a substantive evangelical analysis of feminist Christology. Although religious feminist theologians have written (and continue to write) many books challenging orthodox Christology, evangelical response and critique has been minimal. Millard Erickson devotes a chapter to feminist Christology in *The Word Became Flesh*, primarily as a broad and basic introduction to feminist Christology,³⁶ but his response to feminist Christology offers no critical evaluation of their views and arguments. Colin Greene provides a more insightful examination than Erickson of feminist Christology,³⁷ but

hermeneutics, gender issues, ecclesiology, and especially theology proper. My concern is that Christology is in the cross-hairs for evangelical egalitarian revision as a direct result of the influence of feminist Christology.

³⁶Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 187-214.

³⁷Greene, *Christology in Cultural Perspective*, 218-45.

Greene's assessment is similarly both positive in evaluation and wanting in critical reflection. As such, this dissertation seeks to fill such a lacuna.

Second, this dissertation is crucial in light of the emerging trend among evangelical egalitarians to revise orthodox theology according to feminist concerns and critiques. Wayne Grudem demonstrates the path of evangelical feminism, tracing out revisions in hermeneutics, ecclesiology, and theology proper.³⁸ A number of dissertations have been written in the last twenty years addressing feminist issues and evangelicalism,³⁹ yet only one is concerned with Christology.⁴⁰ So far, evangelicals have been concerned primarily with the growing theological revisionism of evangelical egalitarians in hermeneutics, theology proper, and ecclesiology. This dissertation recognizes the trend leading to Christology and seeks to address this growing threat.⁴¹

³⁸Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than 100 Disputed Questions* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004); and idem, *Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006).

³⁹Peter Robert Schemm, Jr., "North American Evangelical Feminism and the Triune God: A Denial of Trinitarian Relational Order in the Works of Selected Theologians and An Alternative Proposal" (Ph.D. diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2001); Debra Bendel Daniels, "Evangelical Feminism: The Egalitarian-Complementarian Debate" (Ph.D. diss., The University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2003); Alena Amato Ruggerio, "How Interpretation Becomes Truth: Biblical Feminist and Evangelical Complementarian Hermeneutics (Kenneth Burke, Letha Scanzoni, Nancy Hardesty, Wayne Gruden [*sic*], John Piper)" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 2003); and Randall Lee Stinson, "Religious Feminist Revisions of the God-World Relationship and Implications for Evangelical Feminism" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005).

⁴⁰Neil Tucker Gant, "An Analysis of Feminist Christology: Its Historical Background, Hermeneutical Foundations, and Implications for Southern Baptists" (Ph.D. diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1993). Gant's concern with feminist Christology primarily relates to hermeneutics and theological method.

⁴¹Certainly, there is some validity to feminist critiques of traditional Christian theology, particularly with reference to the oppression and abuse of women in the history of the church. Nevertheless, religious feminists wrongly diagnose the problem as

Research Methodology

This dissertation's burden is to engage a broad spectrum of feminist criticisms related to the person and work of Christ. At the same time, certain limitations will govern the accomplishment of such an aim. First, this dissertation will not be an exhaustive study of feminist Christology, given the ever-expanding corpus of feminist challenges to traditional Christology. This analysis will be comprehensive in the sense that many of the major contours of feminist Christological discourse will be considered and critiqued. Second, this dissertation will not be a historical study of the origin and development of feminist Christology. Although these issues will be considered where appropriate, the onus of this work is to consider reformist feminist arguments, criticisms, proposals, and explorations themselves in order to provide a responsible patriarchal analysis and critique.

Chapter 2 will focus upon feminist theological method, in order to understand properly feminist *Christological* method. Although there is no *unified* feminist theological method, most feminists do share commonalities in approaching theological formulation.⁴² The purpose of this preparatory chapter is to provide insight into the principles, sources, and norms that govern feminist theology. My primary dialogue partners in the chapter on feminist theological method will be Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Rosemary Radford Ruether.⁴³ Other significant feminist contributions to

intrinsic to Christian theology itself, and thus, wrongly prescribe unacceptable solutions for change in doctrine and practice.

⁴²Pamela Dickey Young, *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 17.

⁴³Anne E. Carr notes the significance of these two feminist theologians, in particular, for feminist theological method. Anne E. Carr, "The New Vision of Feminist

theological method from additional radical and religious feminists will be included and analyzed where appropriate.

The bulk of this dissertation will be describing, analyzing and critiquing feminist Christological explorations and proposals. In chapters 3 and 4, specific attention will be given to the person and work of Christ, respectively. Christology is often divided into these two categories—the *person* of Christ and the *work* of Christ—taxonomy that appeared in medieval scholastic theology.⁴⁴ Both categories must be considered for a holistic Christology, because *who* Christ was affects *what* he did, and vice-versa.⁴⁵ Particular attention will be given to the feminist arguments against classical Christology (i.e., Chalcedonian Christology) and classical atonement theories in order to substantiate the alternative proposals to follow. Finally, biblical-theological evaluation and critique will be presented.

Evangelical analysis consists of both agreements and disagreements with feminist proposals and criticisms of classical Christology. Evangelicals may agree with feminist theologians that the Bible is a patriarchal document and that the preponderance of Christian theology has been conducted from the standpoint of a patriarchal

Theology,” in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 5-29.

⁴⁴Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 692.

⁴⁵Ibid., 693. See also Douglas McCready, *He Came Down From Heaven* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 31-32. Given the importance in subject matter of both Christological aspects, theologians have often considered each aspect on its own (although keeping them vitally connected). For two excellent examples from the *Contours of Christian Theology* series, see Donald MacLeod, *The Person of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998); and Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993).

worldview.⁴⁶ In disagreement, however, evangelicals may resist the myopic lens through which feminists seek to revise Christian theology and tradition. Feminist Christological reconstructions are insufficient when considered only from the perspective of women's (gendered) experience. On the contrary, Scripture provides the data for Christological reflection, not personal experience. Scripture is the starting point and the finishing point for Christology, and as such, "it prescribes the problems and defines the issues with which a fully articulated and integrated [C]hristology must finally deal."⁴⁷

Finally, consideration will be given to the impact and influence of feminist Christological proposals within broader evangelicalism. In support of the main thesis, chapter 5 will posit that current evangelical acceptance of feminist critiques related to biblical patriarchy, theology proper, Scripture and hermeneutics, and ecclesiology will lead eventually to an acceptance of feminist revisions in Christology, particularly with regard to the atonement.⁴⁸ In light of chapters 3 and 4, feminist proposals will be countered with an evangelical Christology that recognizes and embraces the patriarchal categories and nomenclature of Scripture.⁴⁹

⁴⁶See Guenther Haas, "Patriarchy As An Evil That God Tolerated: Analysis and Implications for the Authority of Scripture," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38 (1995): 321-36. For the definition of "patriarchy" in view, see p. 7 above. Unfortunately, the term "patriarchy" has become pejorative to many, and often connotes the idea of oppression. Biblically understood, however, patriarchy need not reflect the treacherous actions, stereotypes, and conclusions raised by religious feminist theological criticisms.

⁴⁷John McIntyre, *The Shape of Christology*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 17.

⁴⁸Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 535.

⁴⁹For an excellent example, see Robert L. Reymond, *Jesus, Divine Messiah* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2003).

Conclusion

This dissertation on feminist Christology draws together the theological formulation and exploratory proposals of feminist theologians related to Christ's person and work for the purpose of analysis and critique from an evangelical perspective. Although feminist discourse and revisions may be growing in popularity in evangelical circles (e.g., egalitarians or evangelical feminists), this dissertation contends that the feminist rejection of a biblical, classical (i.e., patriarchal) Christology leads to insurmountable theological difficulties, and thus, is unacceptable for evangelical Christological formulation.

CHAPTER 2
FEMINIST THEOLOGICAL METHOD
AND CHRISTOLOGY

Introduction

Radical feminist Mary Daly famously critiqued the task of theological method:

One of the false gods of theologians, philosophers, and other academics is called Method. It commonly happens that the choice of a problem is determined by method, instead of method being determined by the problem. The tyranny of methodolatry hinders new discoveries. It prevents us from raising questions never asked before and from being illumined by ideas that do not fit into pre-established boxes and forms.¹

In spite of Daly's lament over the constraints of theological method, "the history of feminist theological methodology reveals that it is precisely the problems being addressed and the questions being asked that have determined the methods of feminist theological investigation."² Feminist theology proceeds from the question, "How would theology be different if women were its subjects and its audience?"³ Given the nature of this question, theology will be profoundly different than traditional theology since it will be conducted according to feminist ideology, concerns, and criticisms.

¹Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1973), 11.

²Gloria L. Schaab, "Feminist Theological Methodology: Toward a Kaleidoscopic Model," *Theological Studies* 62 (2001): 341.

³Pamela Dickey Young, *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 57.

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the basic principles, sources, and norms that compose the complex matrix of feminist theological method. The benefit of any study of prolegomena is to recognize the factors that govern one's theological formulation. Understanding feminist theological method is a crucial pursuit for this dissertation, since "one's theological method in large part determines one's theological outcome."⁴ The contention of this chapter, in light of the thesis of the dissertation itself, is that feminist theological method shapes and grounds feminist Christological exploration and revision.

Arguably, the contributions of two prominent religious feminists dominate feminist theological method, namely, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza⁵ and Rosemary Radford Ruether.⁶ Both have written extensively on issues related to theological method, and their work is widely known and accessible. The work of these particular feminist theologians will serve as the lens through which to understand the broad contours of feminist theological method.⁷

⁴Ibid., 17. Young continues, "Theological method here means some answer to the question, What is theology and how does one get one with the process of theologizing? In articulating a theological method, theologians tell their readers what they understand themselves to be doing; they explain how they understand the theological task, including perhaps most especially what they mean by theology." Ibid., 19.

⁵Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza is the Krister Stendhal Professor of Scripture and Interpretation at the Harvard Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

⁶Rosemary Radford Ruether is Carpenter Emerita Professor of Feminist Theology at Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California, and Georgia Harkness Emerita Professor of Applied Theology at Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois.

⁷I have chosen Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Rosemary Radford Ruether for this investigation because of their contributions to this field and because they consider themselves within Christianity rather than outside it. See Young, *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology*, 24.

Lack of Unanimity in Feminist Theological Method

Mary Aquin O’Neill avers, “While women writing theology have mined new sources and introduced the question of experience into consideration, [one] cannot see that there is a distinct ‘feminist method’ in theology, or even a method that brings into theological discourse a textual equivalent of the woman’s way of being embodied in the world.”⁸ Pamela Dickey Young agrees, stating that “there is no unanimity in feminist theology when it comes to the articulation and use of a particular theological methodology.”⁹ Young argues that this unanimity must not be perceived as a weakness, but actually a strength pointing to the rich diversity and depth of feminist theological thought and opinion.¹⁰

Although one distinct feminist theological method does not exist, certain methodological commonalities exist as feminist theology seeks to articulate itself in light of traditional theology; namely, critical analysis of patriarchy, constructive exploration through women’s experience, and conceptual transformation of traditional theology.¹¹ Furthermore, Susan Frank Parsons identifies several “dogmas” or underlying convictions which most, if not all feminists hold, and which underpin feminist theology in its various forms and expressions. These dogmas include the structural injustice of sexism, the

⁸Mary Aquin O’Neill, “The Nature of Women and the Method of Theology,” *Theological Studies* 56 (1995): 741. See also Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon, 1993), 20.

⁹Young, *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology*, 17.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Feminist Liberation Theology as Critical Sophiology,” in *The Power of Naming*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), xxiii. See also Young’s assessment of feminist agreement, *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology*, 15-17.

grounding of theology in women's experience, and commitment to liberating and empowering women from systemic male oppression.¹²

With these dogmas and commonalities in view, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (and feminist theology in general) calls for a paradigm shift in theological method. This shift is from "malestream scholarship produced by kyriarchal academic institutions, to a feminist comprehension of the world, human life, and Christian faith. Such a paradigm shift would not only produce different emancipatory knowledges but also a different kind of theology."¹³ To accomplish this paradigm shift, the task of feminist theology must not be "*just to understand* and explicate doctrinal Christian texts and traditions *but to change* Western idealist hermeneutic frameworks, individualistic religious practices and exclusivistic socio-political relations."¹⁴

Religious feminists like Schüssler Fiorenza propose a different theo-ethical religious vision in order "to reform malestream knowledge about the world and G*d in order to correct and complete the world's and the church's one-sided vision."¹⁵

¹²Susan Frank Parsons, "Feminist Theology as Dogmatic Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, ed. Susan Frank Parsons (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 114-34. See also Nicola Slee, *Faith and Feminism* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2003), 3ff.

¹³Schüssler Fiorenza, "Feminist Liberation Theology," xxix. A note on terminology: *malestream* was coined by Dorothy Smith to describe the prevailing androcentric currents, as a play on words from "mainstream." Also, Schüssler Fiorenza coined the phrase *kyriarchy* to rename patriarchy so as to reflect the socio-cultural, religious, political *system* of elite male power instead of merely the gender/sexism of patriarchy. *Ibid.*, xxi.

¹⁴Schüssler Fiorenza, "G*d at Work in Our Midst: From a Politics of Identity to a Politics of Struggle," *Feminist Theology* 13 (1996): 48, emphasis mine.

¹⁵Schüssler Fiorenza, "Feminist Liberation Theology," xiii. "G*d" is indicated to replace the conservative Jewish malestream "G-d."

According to feminist theologians, feminist theological method is intended to contrast and expose traditional, patriarchal theology for what it is—*half a theology*. Thus, feminist theology seeks to remedy the church’s one-sided vision by providing the material—via the uniqueness of women’s experience—for making half a theology a whole theology.¹⁶

Theological Starting Point: Women’s Experience

Two major theological contributions in the twentieth century provided a breakthrough “that have allowed women to legitimate their experience as forms of theological reflection: Process Thought and Liberation Theology.”¹⁷ Both movements inform feminist theological pursuit by positioning experience as central to theological formulation.¹⁸ Feminist theology is not unique in claiming experience as the basis for theological reflection; the same is true for process and liberation theologies. Kantian philosophy, advanced by the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher, posited this “turn to

¹⁶Young, *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology*, 67.

¹⁷Lisa Isherwood and Dorothea McEwan, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield, England: Sheffield, 2001), 77. See also the article on “Methodology” in their earlier work, *An A to Z of Feminist Theology*, ed. Lisa Isherwood and Dorothea McEwan (Sheffield, England: Sheffield, 1996), 138-41. For liberation theology, see Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, rev. ed., trans. and ed. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988); Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987); and Christopher Rowland, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999). For process thought, see Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Macmillan, 1929); idem, *Modes of Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938); Charles Hartshorne, *Reality as Social Process: Studies in Metaphysics and Religion* (Glencoe, IL: Free, 1953); and Norman Pittenger, *The Lure of Divine Love* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979).

¹⁸Isherwood and McEwan, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 83. See also Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 224-36.

the subject” in Enlightenment Europe during the eighteenth century. Kathryn Greene-McCreight rightly notes that Kant’s philosophical distinctives and Schleiermacher’s focus on personal experience are the “intellectual parents of Christian feminist theology.”¹⁹ Feminist theology, in all its diversity, is a child of the Enlightenment (and post-Enlightenment theological developments), and it is born out of the logic of modern humanistic thought, “intimately interwoven with its hopes and dilemmas.”²⁰

The uniqueness of feminist theology, according to most feminists, is in claiming *women’s* experience as the foundation of theological reflection.²¹ Therefore, if feminist theology is going to be a “liberation theology of women, [it] must address and deal at length with the central issue of women’s experience.”²² Taking this stipulation seriously, Schüssler Fiorenza not only addresses women’s experience, but makes it central to her theological formulation. She asserts, “A critical feminist theology of liberation, therefore, does not begin its work with kyriocentric Scriptures, malestream theological traditions, and ecclesiastical doctrines. Rather, according to Schüssler Fiorenza, a critical feminist theology begins with the feminist experience of wo/men struggling against kyriarchal oppressions as well as for liberation and human dignity.”²³ Like Schüssler Fiorenza, Rosemary Radford Ruether argues for the uniqueness of

¹⁹Kathryn Greene-McCreight, *Feminist Reconstructions of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 29.

²⁰Parsons, “Feminist Theology as Dogmatic Theology,” 124.

²¹Isherwood and McEwan, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 92.

²²Angela Pears, “Women’s Experience and Authority in Feminist Theology,” *Feminist Theology* 9 (1995): 112.

²³Schüssler Fiorenza, “Feminist Liberation Theology,” xxii.

women's experience for contemporary theology and central for theological formulation.²⁴

She explains,

The uniqueness of feminist theology lies not in its use of the criterion of experience but rather in its use of women's experience, which has been almost entirely shut out of theological reflection in the past. The use of women's experience in feminist theology, therefore, explodes as a critical force, exposing classical theology, including its codified traditions, as based on male experience rather than on universal human experience.²⁵

Defining exactly what constitutes "women's experience" is profoundly difficult, however. Feminists concede the ambiguity of definition, even though lack of clarity poses no hindrance to the championing of its centrality for theological reflection.²⁶ Part of the ambiguity of definition over women's experience is tied to the multi-faceted constituency of feminist theologians themselves. Race, economic status, and sexual orientation are just a few examples of the many demarcations among feminist theologians. Although the divergences in personal experience and context often lead to flagrant individualism,²⁷ feminist theology receives warmly the panoply of voices arising from global differences among women.

As diverse as the nature of women's experience may be, the attempt to categorize particular aspects of women's experience is equally as varied. Women at least have one thing in common according to feminist theologians: the shared experience of

²⁴Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Interpretation: A Method of Correlation," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 112.

²⁵Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 13.

²⁶Isherwood and McEwan, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 93ff.

²⁷Parsons, "Feminist Theology as Dogmatic Theology," 117. Compare also Letty M. Russell, "Authority and the Challenge of Feminist Interpretation," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 144.

living under the oppression and tyranny of patriarchal, androcentric societies.²⁸ So, Ruether contends that women's experience is not primarily about biological differences as much as it is about living with biological differences in a male-dominated culture.²⁹ Biological differences are not inconsequential for feminist theological reflection, however, since biological factors (among other things) determine the nuances involved in the broad spectrum of women's experience.³⁰

Regardless of the necessary ambiguity and diversity of women's experience, feminist theologians argue that the starting point for theological reflection must be women's experience.³¹ Ruether posits that the Judeo-Christian tradition has been caught up in a self-delusion that an authority outside contemporary experience can or should be the starting point for theology, and she calls for an alternative starting point in the "critical principle of feminist theology."³²

In addition to this opposition to outside authority, Young contends that women's experience is suitable as the starting point for theology for two reasons. First, "The question of women's experience is raised because women do not find much of

²⁸Young, *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology*, 68. Certainly, women have faced their share of oppression and domination by men in society, and also in the church. Although feminist theologians are prone to exaggerate this point, the heart of their critique here is important. Without a doubt, much sin and injustice has been carried out upon women by men in families, society, and church. Evangelicals should resonate with this cry against sin and injustice, and work to absolve such sinful oppression and tyranny.

²⁹Ruether, "Feminist Interpretation," 113.

³⁰Young, *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology*, 53-56.

³¹Isherwood and McEwan, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 91-92.

³²Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 16-20. The critical principle of feminist theology is anything that promotes the "full humanity of women." This concept will be discussed in more detail below.

contemporary theology *credible*. Rather than finding [traditional] Christian theology liberating, many women have experienced only or mainly oppression from it.”³³ At the heart of this sentiment is the notion that theology has been done always and only by men; thus, feminists call for another voice for theology. Second, Young does not assume “that there is any neutral, objective place one can stand to do one’s theologizing. One must be willing to articulate the starting point for one’s theology rather than claiming to stand outside all commitments.”³⁴

The charge that feminist theologians level against traditional theology is that “the absence of input from the experiences of [women] has prevented white, male, middle-class, First-World theology from seeing its limitations.”³⁵ Further, if Scripture is thoroughly patriarchal, resulting in androcentric theology, then Scripture’s role must be diminished and replaced with a starting point that brings in input from women. According to religious feminists, traditional theology has been unable to do this since it remains committed to the *norma normans non normata* of the Bible.

But how does feminist theology perceive Scripture? Although this issue will be addressed more below, the notion that most feminists retain the Bible (in some form) for their theological reflection must be shown here. Schüssler Fiorenza avers that because the Bible carries enormous political power—within ecclesial authority structures and society at large—then women must claim the Bible for themselves.³⁶ Assuming the

³³Young, *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology*, 62, emphasis original.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 59.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 64.

³⁶Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, rev. ed. (Boston: Beacon, 1995), 9.

Bible is not going to be discarded or forgotten in Western civilization any time soon, Schüssler Fiorenza contends that women must transform it for liberation or continue to be subjected to its “kyriarchal” tyranny.³⁷

Therefore, feminist theology cannot start with the “normative authority” of the Bible, “but must begin with women’s experience in their struggle for liberation.”³⁸ By taking women’s experience as the normative authority, religious feminists subject the Bible itself to feminist scrutiny and experience. The experiential authority of women-church, or the fully egalitarian religious community, supercedes any tradition or traditional interpretation of the biblical text.³⁹ In sum, feminist theologians in biblical religions (e.g., Schüssler Fiorenza and Ruether) refuse to separate the sources like the Bible, doctrines and traditions, etc., from the experience and praxis of oppressed and overlooked communities.⁴⁰ Rather, feminists seek to transform theology for the purpose of women’s liberation, beginning with the norming authority of women’s experience.

Sources and Norms of Feminist Theology

Pamela Young helpfully notes that theological method, including feminist theological methodology, concerns itself with “the sources from which a given theology arises or is drawn and with the norms that the theologian uses to argue for the adequacy

³⁷Mitzi L. Minor, “Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth,” in *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 608.

³⁸Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 13.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 13-14, 60.

⁴⁰See Mary Grey, “Method in Feminist Theology,” *Feminist Theology* 6 (1994): 101.

of her or his own theology or to judge the adequacy of other theologies.”⁴¹ The purpose of this section is to delineate and describe the sources and norms that enter into feminist theological formulation and that function as the structuring principles and criteria for feminist theology. Three categories will be presented in summation of feminist sources and norms: (1) women’s experience; (2) Scripture and tradition; and (3) history and reality.

Women’s Experience

Given the previous discussion of women’s experience as the starting point for feminist theology, it comes as no surprise that women’s experience functions as the primary source and norm for feminist theological reflection. In her well-known work *Sexism and God-Talk*, Ruether noted that “it has frequently been said that feminist theology draws upon women’s experience as a basic source of content as well as a criterion of truth.”⁴² Nicola Slee concurs, adding, “Women’s experience is called upon as both *source* and *norm* in feminist theory. It is the substance, material and evidence upon which theology is developed and built, on the one hand; and it is the norm against which all theories and claims are judged, on the other.”⁴³ Why do feminists place women’s experience as source and norm? Slee continues by raising a familiar theme: “By insisting on doing theology from the perspective of women’s experience, feminists are both calling attention to the androcentrism of previous theology and seeking to redress the imbalance

⁴¹Young, *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology*, 19.

⁴²Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 12.

⁴³Slee, *Faith and Feminism*, 5, emphasis original.

of a religious tradition in which the dominant forms of thought and expression have been owned and controlled by men.”⁴⁴

Experience provides for feminist theology not only the first principle of theology, but also revelatory content through the struggle of the egalitarian religious community, or women-church. Ruether argues that Scripture and tradition, which have traditionally been understood as sources of theology, are merely codified collective human experience anyway.⁴⁵ Under this conviction of the revelatory nature of human experience, Schüssler Fiorenza argues that “the locus of divine revelation and grace is therefore not simply the Bible or the tradition of a patriarchal church but the ‘church of women’ in the past and in the present.”⁴⁶ Mary McClintock Fulkerson posits, in agreement, that the feminist appeal to experience is evoked against the traditional concept of divine (transcendent) revelation in order to ground revelation in historical (immanent) categories.⁴⁷ Thus, women’s experience—as the locus of revelation—functions as the *only* norm adequate for theology.⁴⁸

Schüssler Fiorenza argues that since “the androcentric texts of the First and Second Testaments reflect male experience, so also the stories rooted in women’s

⁴⁴Ibid. See also Linda Hogan, *From Women’s Experience to Feminist Theology* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield, 1995). Hogan’s work provides insight into the historical and theological development of women’s experience as source and norm.

⁴⁵Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 12.

⁴⁶Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, xv, xvii. See also Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 29.

⁴⁷Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject: Women’s Discourses and Feminist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 51.

⁴⁸Young, *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology*, 20.

experience constitute a Third Testament which deserves canonical status.”⁴⁹ Although a new textual base logically deserves canonical status, Schüssler Fiorenza noted that she would not want to do this because it would “reinscribe the cultural-theological male/female dualism as *canonical* dualism,”⁵⁰ as well as relinquish the first two testaments to the powers that be. Finally, since women’s experience is the locus of revelation and standard of authority, Schüssler Fiorenza starts from this locus to dismantle patriarchal and androcentric biblical texts and to reconstruct history so as to reflect the history *of* women as history *for* women, to which sources and norms we now turn.

Scripture and Tradition

A fundamental idea in religious feminist theory is that “all texts are products of an androcentric patriarchal culture and history.”⁵¹ For feminist theology, then, “a critical theology of liberation has developed over and against symbolic androcentrism and patriarchal domination within biblical religion, while at the same time seeking to recover the biblical heritage of women for the sake of empowering women in the struggle for liberation.”⁵² However feminists perceive the Bible, the issue of women’s identity and the role of patriarchy in suppressing that identity are always kept in the fore.⁵³

⁴⁹Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said* (Boston: Beacon, 1992), 148-49.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 149, emphasis original.

⁵¹Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, xv.

⁵²*Ibid.*, xxii.

⁵³Greene-McCreight, *Feminist Reconstructions*, 37.

Although Schüssler Fiorenza and Ruether comprise the lens through which this discussion of Scripture and tradition in feminist theology proceeds, feminists are categorized in different ways according to how they view the Bible and its import for feminist theology.⁵⁴ Both Schüssler Fiorenza and Ruether fall into the same category as feminists who retain the Bible as a source for theology but supplement it and revise it according to feminist commitments. Neither accepts the Bible as the inspired Word of God (as evangelical feminists do), nor do they reject the Bible outright because it is irredeemably patriarchal (as post-Christian or secular feminists do). With this distinction in mind, among feminists who remain loyal to biblical religions (and there is a wide spectrum here) there are none as influential as Schüssler Fiorenza and Ruether.

Arguing against what Schüssler Fiorenza labels right-wing Christian neo-fundamentalism⁵⁵ and liberal theological androcentrism, feminist theology strives to keep biblical interpretation from “reinforcing the dominant patriarchal system and phallogocentric mindset” prevalent in these two camps.⁵⁶ The very essence of a critical

⁵⁴Some representative studies are Carolyn Osiek, “The Feminist and the Bible,” in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1985), 93-105; Hershel Shanks, ed., *Feminist Approaches to the Bible* (Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1995); Francis Martin, *The Feminist Question: Feminist Theology in Light of Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); and David M. Scholer, “Feminist Hermeneutics and Evangelical Biblical Interpretation,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 15 (1991): 305-20.

⁵⁵Schüssler Fiorenza categorizes this group as those who hold “an understanding of the Bible as a historically accurate record of God’s will,” and castigates them for their “biblicist certainty” that is “based upon an outdated theological understanding of biblical revelation but also on a historicist misunderstanding of what the Bible is all about.” Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 68. She also purports that critical biblical scholarship intellectually rules out fundamentalist literalism and plenary inspiration. Idem, *Bread Not Stone*, 164.

⁵⁶Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 4-5.

feminist theology of liberation is the “commitment to a perception of human liberation as the central message of the Bible.”⁵⁷

Schüssler Fiorenza contends that if one accepts oppressive patriarchal texts—such as the Old and New Testaments—as the Word of God, then the resultant belief is that God is an oppressive God,⁵⁸ exactly what feminist theology is arguing against and seeking to overcome. The only solution for this predicament is to determine that the Bible is merely a document of its day, reflecting common socio-cultural patriarchal perspectives. Schüssler Fiorenza states this explicitly: “As androcentric texts, our early Christian sources are theological interpretations, argumentations, projections, and selections rooted in a patriarchal culture.”⁵⁹

Therefore, the Bible itself is merely a social construct of antiquated texts written by men and for men.⁶⁰ Since the biblical texts are social-rhetorical constructs reflecting an androcentric perspective, the logical conclusion is that the Bible is not inspired by God.⁶¹ Schüssler Fiorenza asserts that “Biblical texts are not verbally inspired revelation nor doctrinal principles but historical formulations within the context of a religious community.”⁶² Furthermore, “Inspiration cannot be located in texts or books,

⁵⁷H. M. Conn, “Feminist Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 255.

⁵⁸Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, xiii.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 108; *idem*, *In Memory of Her*, 60.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 112.

⁶¹Slee, *Faith and Feminism*, 23.

⁶²Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, xv.

but its process is found in the believing community and in its history as the people of God.”⁶³

But even the believing community cannot be trusted, since their context was patriarchal and androcentric. Thus, feminist theology “cannot trust or accept Bible and tradition simply as divine revelation . . . This insight particularizes the results of historical-critical scholarship that the Bible is written by human authors or male authors.”⁶⁴ Consequently, if the Bible demonstrates any revelatory truth at all, it must always be with reference to liberation, and especially women’s liberation; only those texts that break through patriarchal culture have the theological authority of revelation.⁶⁵ Otherwise, the invisibility and inferiority of women are canonized and perpetuated.⁶⁶

Schüssler Fiorenza and Ruether seek to apply their feminist theological work to biblical religion (e.g., Roman Catholic Christianity). So, they argue, the Bible (and other religious texts) must be examined critically in order to reconstruct the core message of women’s liberation. In fact, “the litmus test for evoking the Scripture as the Word of God must be whether or not biblical texts and traditions seek to end relations of domination and exploitation.”⁶⁷

Ruether insists that the Bible alone is insufficient as a text for women’s liberation from patriarchy. What is more, she avers that the deposit of traditional

⁶³Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 140.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, x-xi.

⁶⁵Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 33.

⁶⁶Slee, *Faith and Feminism*, 15-17.

⁶⁷Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, xiii.

theology is permeated with patriarchy and androcentrism. Thus, Christian exegesis and theology must be supplemented with resources from traditions outside of Christianity.⁶⁸

Although Ruether uses the Bible in theological formulation, extra-biblical and extra-Christian (even heretical) texts are mined as sources for feminist theology.⁶⁹ She speaks of her method of incorporating additional traditions as “practical eclecticism” or “feminist ecumenism.”⁷⁰

Ruether takes “usable tradition” from any source that promotes the full humanity of women and women’s liberation from patriarchy. She states,

I draw “usable tradition” from five areas of cultural tradition: (1) Scripture, both Hebrew and Christian (Old and New Testaments); (2) marginalized or “heretical” Christian traditions, such as Gnosticism, Montanism, Quakerism, Shakerism; (3) the primary theological themes of the dominant stream of classical Christian theology—Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant; (4) non-Christian Near Eastern and Greco-Roman religion and philosophy; and (5) critical post-Christian world views such as liberalism, romanticism, and Marxism.⁷¹

Granted, not all feminists are willing to incorporate fully the resources that Ruether proposes for feminist theological formulation, particularly the so-called heretical traditions or secular philosophical frameworks like Marxism. Nonetheless, feminists are willing to accept the dividends provided by Ruether’s collaboration of “usable tradition”; namely, the promotion of women’s liberation from patriarchy, that is, male oppression.

⁶⁸Slee, *Faith and Feminism*, 23.

⁶⁹Anne E. Carr, “The New Vision of Feminist Theology,” in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 17.

⁷⁰Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Feminist Spirituality and Historical Religion,” *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 16, no. 3 (1986): 11.

⁷¹Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 21-22.

Regardless of the texts or traditions employed as sources for feminist theology, the meta-hermeneutic adopted among feminist theologians is that every text and tradition “must be tested as to their feminist liberating content and function in their historical and contemporary contexts.”⁷² Consequently, “the ‘truth’ of a feminist hermeneutical position depends on its potential to orient biblical interpretation towards emancipation, liberation, and wholeness for women.”⁷³ As such, Ruether’s (and Schüssler Fiorenza’s) main approach to biblical interpretation—far from historical-grammatical exegesis—is to uncover and emphasize the internal, prophetic critique of Scripture; that is, the Bible’s critique of itself.⁷⁴

Schüssler Fiorenza employs several hermeneutical principles in biblical interpretation in light of the feminist commitment to women’s liberation from patriarchy. First, she uses a *hermeneutic of suspicion*, which takes as its starting point the assumption that biblical texts and their interpretations are androcentric and serve patriarchal functions.⁷⁵ A hermeneutic of suspicion understands androcentric texts to be ideological articulations of men expressing and maintaining patriarchal historical conditions.⁷⁶ This

⁷²Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “The Will to Choose or to Reject: Continuing Our Critical Work,” in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 131. The neologism “meta-hermeneutic” is my own expression.

⁷³Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza et al., “Roundtable Discussion: On Feminist Methodology,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 1, no. 2 (1985): 75.

⁷⁴Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 12-46. Cf. Young, *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology*, 37.

⁷⁵Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 15. Cf. idem, *But She Said*, 57-62.

⁷⁶Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 60.

method is designed to explore the liberation or oppression latent in any given texts, with the purpose of exposing the androcentrism of the text.

Second, she uses a *hermeneutic of proclamation*, which identifies those kyriarchal texts and insists that they should not be used in Christian worship or catechesis.⁷⁷ Part of this hermeneutic of proclamation is the insistence that theologians not clothe the androcentric biblical texts with divine authority, but merely represent them as the writings of men in patriarchal societies.⁷⁸

Third, Schüssler Fiorenza employs a *hermeneutic of remembrance*, which proposes theoretical models for historical reconstructions that put women at the center of biblical theology and community.⁷⁹ The goal of this approach is to relocate women in biblical history by reading between the lines in the assumed historical rhetoric of the patriarchal Scriptures. Finally, she uses a *hermeneutic of creative actualization*, which seeks to retell the biblical stories from a feminist perspective by means of historical imagination, narrative amplifications, artistic recreations, and liturgical celebrations.⁸⁰

These hermeneutical principles fulfill the premise that “the hermeneutical center of feminist biblical interpretation is the women-church (*ekklēsia gynaikōn*), the egalitarian movement of self-identified women and women-identified men in biblical religion.”⁸¹ This hermeneutical center is consistent with the primacy of women’s

⁷⁷Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 18-19. Compare idem, *But She Said*, 68-73.

⁷⁸Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 69.

⁷⁹Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 20. See also idem, *But She Said*, 62-68.

⁸⁰Ibid., 21. See also idem, *But She Said*, 73-76.

⁸¹Schüssler Fiorenza, “The Will to Choose,” 126.

experience as first principle, norm, and criterion of truth applied to biblical interpretation. Accordingly, as Schüssler Fiorenza notes, the hermeneutical premise of liberation theology in general is that biblical interpretation must not aim solely at the meaning of a biblical text, but rather to seek the emancipatory praxis which becomes concrete in resultant social action.⁸²

In sum, much of feminist theology relegates the Bible to an open-ended source of transformational possibilities. The Bible is considered to be, according to Schüssler Fiorenza, prototype and not archetype.⁸³ An archetype represents something that is a closed, ideal form with timeless, unchanging patterns. But a prototype represents something that is critically open to its own transformation. Schüssler Fiorenza's archetype/prototype distinction fosters the claim that the Bible is not normative, but is an "experiential enabling authority, as the legacy and heritage of women-church."⁸⁴ If the Bible is considered as archetype, however, then it remains nothing more than a vehicle for the furtherance of patriarchal male oppression.⁸⁵ Accordingly, Schüssler Fiorenza concludes that "a critical theology of liberation cannot take the Bible or the biblical faith defined as the total process of learning through ideologies as *norma normans non normata*, but must understand them as sources alongside other sources."⁸⁶

⁸²Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 136. Cf. Gustavo Gutiérrez, "The Task and Content of Liberation Theology," trans. Judith Connor, in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, ed. Christopher Rowland (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 19-38.

⁸³Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 33.

⁸⁴Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Will to Choose," 136.

⁸⁵Greene-McCreight, *Feminist Reconstructions*, 39.

⁸⁶Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 59.

History and Reality

Schüssler Fiorenza claims that all texts from history reflect the patriarchal structures and androcentrism of the respective eras. Since the record of history is androcentric, historical knowledge must itself be a major object of study for feminist analysis.⁸⁷ As argued above, Western women cannot afford to discard their history; thus, the only options are to transform it for themselves or continue to live in subjection under its radical androcentrism.⁸⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza declares her approach as attempting to “reconstruct early Christian history as women’s history in order not only to restore women’s stories to early Christian history but also to reclaim this history as the history of women and men.”⁸⁹

Schüssler Fiorenza contends that there is no such thing as historical objectivity and that each historian injects her or his own presuppositions, politics, and perspectives into historical interpretation. She states, “Historical interpretation is defined by contemporary questions and horizons of reality and conditioned by contemporary political interests and structures of domination.”⁹⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza argues that just as the historical interpretations are biased, so also are the historical texts themselves. As a result, such texts are not to be trusted, since they reflect only the political and religious

⁸⁷Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, xx.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, xix. So, the goal of feminist theology then becomes retrieval, reinterpretation, and reconstruction of a “usable past” for Christian feminist theology. See Eleanor McLaughlin, “The Christian Past: Does It Hold a Future for Women?,” in *Womanspirit Rising*, ed. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (St. Louis: Harper & Row, 1979), 93-106; and Letty M. Russell, *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective: A Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 78ff.

⁸⁹Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, xiv.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, xvii.

rhetoric of their male authors. In fact, “androcentric texts and documents do not mirror historical reality, report historical facts, or tell us how it actually was.”⁹¹

Following this line of thinking, Schüssler Fiorenza can further suggest that “readers of the Bible are generally not aware that biblical histories are neither reports of events nor transcripts of facts, but rather rhetorical constructions that have shaped the information available to them in light of their religious or political interests.”⁹² The biblical writers were men of their day and age; therefore, their words do not present reality as it really was, but only relay an underlying political or patriarchal agenda. If historical documents, especially the Bible, do not reflect factual reality, then the objective of feminist theologians and historians is to read the androcentric texts for clues that point to the actual reality embedded in them. Schüssler Fiorenza argues,

Rather than understand the texts as an adequate reflection of the reality about which they speak, we must search for rhetorical clues and allusions that indicate the reality about which the texts are silent. Rather than take androcentric biblical texts as informative “data” and objective reports, we should understand them as social constructions by men and for men and read their “silences” as indications of the historical reality of women about which they do not speak directly.⁹³

Schüssler Fiorenza posits two perspectives of historical epistemology. First, an “objectivist” approach argues that the past can be known scientifically as “it actually was.” Second, and the approach of Schüssler Fiorenza, is a “constructivist” approach, which argues that historical knowledge is “time-bound” and “linguistically-bound” to the

⁹¹Ibid., 60.

⁹²Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 32.

⁹³Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 112. See also idem, *In Memory of Her*, 41.

period under consideration.⁹⁴ Thus, recorded history is not an accurate description of events as they really happened.

Historians must deal selectively with the material presented to them, understanding that reality is “encoded” or embedded in language only for historical significance. Hayden White describes history as “a progressive redescription of sets of events in such a way as to dismantle a structure encoded in one verbal mode in the beginning so as to justify a recording of it in another mode at the end.”⁹⁵ The goal, then, is to present merely a coherent historical narrative, not a factual report of real events.⁹⁶ Some events undoubtedly occurred in the past, but historical representation only gives meaning, not existence, to past events.⁹⁷ Consequently, feminist theologians argue, biblical history is not the record of actual, factual realities; rather, early Christian history only depends on the coherence of a unifying vision.⁹⁸

In conclusion, Schüssler Fiorenza and Ruether reflect the radical paradigm shift in the knowledge and interpretation of Scripture, tradition, history and reality sought after in feminist theology. Feminists contend that any sufficient inquiry must retrieve, reconstruct, and reinterpret the material from androcentric texts to provide an emancipatory heritage for women. Thus, feminist theology must *prima facie* be rooted in

⁹⁴Ibid., 142.

⁹⁵Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 98.

⁹⁶Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 142.

⁹⁷Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 91.

⁹⁸Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 69.

experience—women’s experience—in order to be a basic source of content as well as a criterion of truth for theological reflection.

Fundamental Principle: Overcoming Patriarchy and Androcentrism

A basic presupposition of feminist theology is that “androcentric Western language and patriarchal religion have ‘erased’ women from history and made them ‘non-beings.’”⁹⁹ Convinced of this assumption, Schüssler Fiorenza posits that “feminist theology presupposes as well as has for its goal an emancipatory ecclesial and theological praxis.”¹⁰⁰ For this reason she labels her perspective a “critical feminist theology of *liberation*.” She grounds her approach on the basic insight of liberation theology that “all theological interpretation and scholarship are engaged, knowingly or not, for or against oppressed people. Intellectual neutrality is not possible in a world of exploitation and oppression.”¹⁰¹ Since this statement is axiomatic for liberation theologies, Schüssler Fiorenza argues that “Christian theology, therefore, has to be rooted in emancipatory praxis and solidarity. The means by which feminist theology grounds its theologizing in emancipatory praxis is consciousness-raising and sisterhood. Consciousness-raising makes theologians aware of their own oppression or the oppression of others.”¹⁰²

⁹⁹Ibid., xviii.

¹⁰⁰Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 63.

¹⁰¹Minor, “Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth,” 608. See also Frederick Herzog, “Liberation Hermeneutics as Ideology Critique,” *Interpretation* 27 (1974): 387-403; Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1976); and Jose Miguez Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

¹⁰²Schüssler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals*, 67.

Raising the consciousness of patriarchal oppression and androcentric perspectives is the first step in emancipatory praxis. Schüssler Fiorenza underscores that liberation from such oppression, in general, is not her primary emphasis. Rather, women's liberation from oppressive, exploitative patriarchal and androcentric structures is the foundational principle of her theological pursuits. Elisabeth Johnson concurs, stating that true feminist theology results when "women's faith seeks understanding in the matrix of the historical struggle for life in the face of oppressive and alienating forces."¹⁰³

The task for feminists is to reclaim the center of theology, so that theology might become and remain more inclusive, rather than a closed patriarchal discipline. Anne Carr notes that "claiming the center will mean that feminist perspectives, if not feminist methods, are so incorporated into the whole of theology that theology itself is transformed."¹⁰⁴ Further, Ruether opines that patriarchy and androcentrism in traditional theology have suppressed the full humanity of women. Thus, the critical principle of feminist theological method is to reverse this disparagement:

The critical principle of feminist theology is the affirmation of and promotion of the full humanity of women. Whatever denies, diminishes, or distorts the full humanity of women is, therefore, to be appraised as non redemptive. Theologically speaking, this means that whatever diminishes or denies the full humanity of women must be presumed not to reflect the authentic nature of things, or to be the message or work of an authentic redeemer or a community of redemption.¹⁰⁵

Therefore, the goal and aim of feminist theological method is to overthrow the patriarchal and androcentric structures that oppress women and hinder full liberation.

¹⁰³Elisabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, 10th anniv. ed. (New York: Crossroad, 2002), 18.

¹⁰⁴Carr, "The New Vision of Feminist Theology," 25.

¹⁰⁵Ruether, "Feminist Interpretation," 115.

Quite literally, for feminist theologians, patriarchy is the enemy.¹⁰⁶ Ruether asserts that patriarchy (and androcentrism) is idolatry and blasphemy, calling for it to be utterly denounced, not merely tolerated, ignored, or even cleaned up as something useful for Christian theology.¹⁰⁷ Thus, patriarchy (or any theological perspective that does not succumb to feminist ideology) must be censured and feminist alternatives pursued.¹⁰⁸ Mary Grey concurs with this aim and offers the trajectory for feminist theology congruent with the centrality of women's experience as the starting point for theology: "The method of feminist theology is twofold: a critique of the patriarchal dualist categories of classical theology, and an alternative constructive movement built on anti-dualist, liberating, justice-making categories, which express the key notions of revelation in *embodied* terms, directly relating to the diverse experiences of women."¹⁰⁹

If feminist theology retains the Bible for theological construction, feminists must recognize (as Phyllis Trible does) that the Bible has a permanent patriarchal stamp,¹¹⁰ which gives rise to patriarchy as the root metaphor for Christianity.¹¹¹ Thus, the task for feminists is to release theology from its patriarchal assumptions, even if it means

¹⁰⁶Isherwood and McEwan, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 95. The term patriarchy here should be taken to mean the structure of male dominance, perceived or actual, in society, home, and religious movements.

¹⁰⁷Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 23.

¹⁰⁸Young, *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology*, 25.

¹⁰⁹Grey, "Feminist Theology," 97, emphasis original.

¹¹⁰Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 202.

¹¹¹Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 147ff.

jettisoning the Bible altogether in order to change the root metaphor of Christianity to something more sympathetic to the full humanity and inclusion of women.

The Problem and Promise of Jesus for Feminist Theology

The contention of this chapter is that feminist theological method affects feminist *Christology*. In order to appreciate the feminist Christological reconstructions in subsequent chapters of this dissertation, feminist theological method must be presented as a first step in understanding the undertaking of feminist theology in general. Thus, given feminist theologians' sources and norms, theological commitments and distinctives, we now have a better vantage point from which to consider the promise and problem of Jesus Christ for feminist theology.

The problem confronting many feminist theologians is the biblical, historical fact that Jesus was *male*. Daphne Hampson states, "The figure of Christ is that of a male figure, and that is not to be evaded. God is conveyed through the use of metaphors which are male and not female. And that history is not to be disposed of. It is necessarily present, and present as central to the religion. . . . But whether feminism can be reconciled with Christianity is a very different question."¹¹² Hampson is correct to note that feminist theologians must recognize the biblical portrait of Jesus as a man. But feminists are not content to merely accept the fact of Jesus' maleness because it casts the central focus of Christianity in androcentric terms. Thus, Jesus (at least the *biblical* Jesus) becomes problematic for the feminist agenda.

¹¹²Daphne Hampson, *Theology and Feminism* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990), 9.

For some feminists, however, Jesus offers great promise for feminist theology. After all, Mary Grey argues, Jesus is not the problem, but rather the dominant (patriarchal) interpretations of who he was.¹¹³ What does Jesus offer feminist theology? Ruether and Schüssler Fiorenza provide two suggestions.

First, Ruether contends that the biblical Jesus actually *undermines* the patriarchal pattern of Scripture.¹¹⁴ Her emphasis on the internal, prophetic critique from Jesus within the Scriptures themselves supports this claim. For Ruether, Jesus is simply a political leader that speaks prophetically to patriarchy, which makes his message important, not his maleness.¹¹⁵ Ruether is, however, concerned about the maleness of Jesus, but through feminist interpretation she strips the biblical Jesus of traditional masculine imagery so that he “can be recognized as a figure remarkably compatible with feminism.”¹¹⁶

Second, Schüssler Fiorenza evades the issue of Jesus’ maleness altogether (and perhaps even Jesus himself) by emphasizing the earliest community of disciples, the community of women surrounding Jesus. Jesus becomes important for women because the movement he spawned and perpetuated was an egalitarian movement.¹¹⁷ Thus, Jesus’ importance is indirect only, since feminist solidarity is not particularly with the man Jesus Christ, but with the women who gathered around him.

¹¹³Grey, “Feminist Theology,” 97.

¹¹⁴Rosemary Radford Ruether, *New Women-New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (New York: Crossroad, 1975), 66.

¹¹⁵Young, *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology*, 38.

¹¹⁶Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 135.

¹¹⁷Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 121.

Conclusion

Ruether's expectation is that as "feminist theology systematically corrects the androcentrism of each category of Christianity, it is to be hoped that the alternative possibilities of the Christian pattern of theology for a liberation theology for women will come into focus."¹¹⁸ Feminist alternatives in Christian theology, particularly related to Christology, develop according to the method by which feminist theology proceeds; namely, from the starting point of women's experience as well as the primary goal of overcoming patriarchy and androcentrism. Feminist biblical interpretation and theological formulation are generated from and judged by these twin emphases, which result in interesting and novel positions and criticisms related to Christ's person and work. As evident from the nature of feminist theological method, feminist aims are more crucial to feminist theology than adherence to a particular criterion or standard, especially patriarchal criteria that governs traditional Christian theology.¹¹⁹

Feminist theological method engenders a paradigm shift from androcentric scholarship to a feminist comprehension of the Christian faith in order to produce a different kind of theology. Foundational to this paradigm shift is the grounding of theology in women's experience. As Pamela Dickey Young contends, "women's experience provides the material for making half a theology a whole theology."¹²⁰ While the problem here may have begun as one of balance, it ends up becoming a total overthrow of traditional Christian doctrine and substance.

¹¹⁸Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 38.

¹¹⁹Young, *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology*, 35.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, 67.

In contrast, Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson argue, “this theological movement is much more than simply a development within orthodox Christianity. . . . On the contrary, in the eyes of its leading [proponents], it necessarily includes radical, sweeping revisions in every area of Christian theology and life.”¹²¹ Likewise, Francis Martin chastises feminist theologians who, by replacing divine revelation with women’s experience, fail to do theology at all.¹²² When theology begins with the subject, and not with divine disclosure (biblical revelation), the result is a mere study in sociology or anthropology.¹²³

When feminist theologians reject the Bible—its status as divine revelation, canonical authority, verbal inspiration, inerrancy, sufficiency, normativity, and communication of truth—then the only authority and source left to govern theology must arise from subjective, personal experience. But as Gloria Schaab recognizes,

feminist theologians who claim “women’s experience” as a primary or sole normative principle—as well as a revelatory source—are confronted with a quandary of definition and applicability because of the particularity of women’s experiences. Since these experiences originate in specific historical and social milieux [*sic*], their appropriation as criteria of adequacy or inadequacy has caused considerable methodological and philosophical difficulties.¹²⁴

¹²¹Grenz and Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology*, 234.

¹²²Martin, *The Feminist Question*, 205. Interestingly, Martin (as well as Grenz and Olsen) is a proponent of women in church leadership, even though he is critical of religious feminist theology.

¹²³Kathryn Greene-McCreight notes the influence of Ludwig Feuerbach upon feminist theology especially at this point. If Feuerbach understood theology, at its heart, to be anthropology, then feminist theologians only shift the focus: “If theology is anthropology, and theology is left to men, then theology is not anthropology at all but ‘aner-ology,’ which excludes ‘gyn-ecology.’” Greene-McCreight, *Feminist Reconstructions*, 30.

¹²⁴Schaab, “Feminist Theological Methodology,” 349.

Schaab rightly takes issue with the ambiguity of women's experience. There is not one, singular experience of what it means to be "women." Instead, women's experience is multi-faceted, representing the experiences of women who are black, white, Jewish, Asian, Latino, lesbian, heterosexual, married, single, poor, rich, etc. Feminist theologians are presumptive to think that experience, especially women's experience, is normative for Christian theology. Susan Frank Parsons correctly surmises, "At some point, a feminist theologian must make some general statements about what is true elsewhere than in the narrative of her own life, and thus about what she herself has no way of knowing if all knowing begins with experience."¹²⁵

Another problem related to the subjectivity of women's experience as the source and norm for theology is the inability for self-criticism. Grenz and Olson query, "Feminist theology is adept at exposing the evils of the patriarchy rooted in society and the church. But what norm does it recognize for criticizing its own principles and practices?"¹²⁶ Arguably, when the external, inspired criterion of divine revelation is surrendered to the subjectivity of women's perceived experiences, then there is no criterion or standard that brings criticism (internal or otherwise) against feminist theological claims.

As Donald Bloesch insists, "When a theology becomes consciously ideological, as in some forms of feminist and liberation theologies, it is bound to lose sight of the transcendent divine criterion, the living Word of God, by which alone it can

¹²⁵Parsons, "Feminist Theology as Dogmatic Theology," 117.

¹²⁶Grenz and Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology*, 234-35.

determine the validity of its social [and theological] evaluations.”¹²⁷ Thus, the norm for Christian theology cannot be women’s experience, for apart from the authority of Scripture, Christianity becomes whatever any individual or group says it is.¹²⁸

Finally, although feminist theologians seek to influence Christian theology through their proposals, the result of their theological methodology and subsequent doctrinal constructions actually contradicts traditional Christian theology, and even issues into the formation of a new theology and a new religion altogether. Schüssler Fiorenza asserts,

Theology is an ongoing activity and process that explores how Christians can and should speak about G*d in very particular kyriarchal situations and ever-changing socio-political contexts. In short, from a critical feminist perspective, theology is best understood as the activity and practice of “naming the Divine.” As such an intellectual-spiritual practice, feminist theology seeks to critically analyze and change the ways Scripture, traditions, and malestream theologies speak about G*d.¹²⁹

She continues,

The Divine is to be renamed again and again in the experiences of struggling for the change and transformation of oppressive structures and dehumanizing ideologies. G*d is to be named as active “power of well-being in our midst.” Thus feminist theology becomes sophialogy, a speaking of and about Divine Wisdom, whose name oscillates between Divine transcendence and human immanence.¹³⁰

Theology, for Schüssler Fiorenza and feminists in general, is not about receiving God’s self-disclosure through verbal revelation in the Bible, but about naming and calling God whatever one needs in order to undergird feminist socio-political

¹²⁷Donald G. Bloesch, *The Battle for the Trinity: The Debate over Inclusive God-Language* (Ann Arbor, MI: Vine, 1985), 85.

¹²⁸Grenz and Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology*, 235.

¹²⁹Schüssler Fiorenza, “Feminist Liberation Theology,” xxxiii.

¹³⁰*Ibid.*, xxxiv.

ideology and agendas. William J. Abraham concludes that feminist theological method “may mean the creation of a new post-Christian religion. There is the creation of a new creed, a new cult, and a new moral code. In this case the canonical reformation has become so radical that it may be best seen as the emergence of a new religion.”¹³¹

In addition, feminist appropriations of Jesus also raise the question whether or not feminist theology is to be considered *Christian* theology. The feminist vision of Jesus does not appear compatible with traditional, orthodox Christianity. Daphne Hampson asserts:

Schüssler Fiorenza wishes to look to the women of the earliest church because she is a Christian. If one is Christian, one must, in some way, make reference to Christ. For a feminist, the most obvious way in which to do this (for Christ is a male figure) is to make reference to the earliest community of disciples, particularly the community of women. It appears to be a very clever move to make. It is however to evade the issue as to whether Christianity and feminism are compatible. The whole *raison d'être* of that early Christian community was that it believed certain things of Christ – at the very least, that it was he whom God raised from the dead.¹³²

If one presumes to speak as a Christian theologian, as Ruether and Schüssler Fiorenza do, then the story of Jesus as presented in Scripture cannot be abandoned and expect to result in *Christian* theology.¹³³

¹³¹William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 461.

¹³²Hampson, *Theology and Feminism*, 34.

¹³³Young, *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology*, 44.

CHAPTER 3

ASSESSING THE PERSON OF CHRIST IN FEMINIST CHRISTOLOGY

Introduction

Today a Christology which elevates Jesus' maleness to ontologically necessary significance suggests that Jesus' humanity does not represent women at all. Incarnation solely into the male sex does not include women and so women are not redeemed.¹

Against several erroneous Christological proposals, the orthodox definition for Christology found in the statement of the Council of Chalcedon (451) provides a careful defense for the assertion that Jesus Christ was both God and man.² The deity *and* humanity of Jesus, Chalcedon demonstrates, must be affirmed simultaneously without the devaluation of either fact related to the person of Jesus Christ. Although such an important affirmation has been retained in orthodox Christology over the centuries, neither the language nor concepts of the Chalcedonian definition have gone unchallenged.

Feminist theologians present one such challenge in contemporary Christology. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen states, "The image of Christ is ambiguous for many contemporary

¹Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Liberation of Christology from Patriarchy," in *Feminist Theology: A Reader*, ed. Ann Loades (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 140.

²Namely, Apollinarianism, Nestorianism and Monophysitism. See Edward R. Hardy, ed., *Christology of the Later Fathers* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), 15-38. For the actual text drafted at the Council, see *ibid.*, 371-74.

women because it has served both as the source of life and as the legitimator of oppression.”³ For feminists, the inevitable stumbling block for a Christology inclusive of women is Jesus the man, God incarnate in a *male* persona.⁴ Kathryn Greene-McCreight recognizes that orthodox Christology, which maintains the biblical fact of the maleness of Jesus, “poses difficulties for feminist theology insofar as feminist theology shares in modern theology’s difficulty with the ‘scandal of particularity.’” She adds, “The notion that the one eternal God, creator of heaven and earth, could come to dwell with humanity in the person of a [male] Jewish carpenter is often offensive to modern sensibilities, which are drawn instead to the universal and the general.”⁵ Thus, since the Christian tradition maintains that God particularly became *man*, feminist theologians allege that such an incarnation alienates one-half of humanity.

The point is, the doctrine of the incarnation does not directly address the female sex.⁶ Yet according to feminist theologians, church history actually reveals the inclination for the use of the incarnation against the female sex. Lisa Isherwood claims, “As the early proponents of feminist theology strove to understand the exclusion of women and women’s experience in church practice and theological reflection, even in churches that had a strong social gospel, they were increasingly faced with the realization

³Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Christology: A Global Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 197.

⁴Colin J. D. Greene, *Christology in Cultural Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 239.

⁵Kathryn Greene-McCreight, *Feminist Reconstructions of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 73.

⁶Julie M. Hopkins, *Towards a Feminist Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 83.

that it may be the very fabric of Christianity that caused the exclusion.”⁷ Consequently, feminist theological analysis began to reveal “that the maleness of Christ himself may be part of the difficulty. . . . If Christ could not experience being female then the question was raised as to whether the female state could be redeemed.”⁸

Feminists reiterate that Chalcedon, in its historical context, “make[s] clear that it is not Jesus’ maleness that is doctrinally important but his humanity in solidarity with the whole suffering human race.”⁹ While the claim related to Jesus’ solidarity with all of humanity is true, of course, feminists want to go beyond Chalcedon to say much more about the nature of the incarnation. In face of this, assert feminists, orthodox Christology introduces incredible trivialization into the doctrine of the incarnation by the “androcentric stress on the maleness of Jesus’ humanity.” Such emphasis on Jesus’ maleness “fully warrants the charge of heresy and even blasphemy currently being leveled against it.”¹⁰

Is it possible, then, for feminists to accept traditional Christology, with its retention of the maleness of Jesus? Julie Hopkins argues that “it is only possible to bring women into the centre of an incarnational christology if the traditional categories are

⁷Lisa Isherwood, *Introducing Feminist Christologies* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2002), 15.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Elizabeth A. Johnson, “Redeeming the Name of Christ,” in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 130.

¹⁰Ibid., 131. For the charge of heresy upon those who emphasize Jesus’ maleness, Johnson cites Patricia Wilson-Kastner, *Faith, Feminism and the Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 90; Sandra Schneiders, *Women and the Word* (New York: Paulist, 1986), 55; and Anne Carr, *Transforming Grace: Christian Tradition and Women’s Experience* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 178.

gender reversible; if, in other words, we may speak of the Divine incarnated in a female body, ‘truly God and truly female’.”¹¹ Hopkins wants a full inclusion of the female into Christology, so that (as the Dutch feminist theologian Anne-Claire Mulder argues) Christian theology may speak of the female flesh becoming Word/Logos.¹² For Hopkins (and feminist theology in general), if this proves to be impossible on Christian theological or moral grounds, then Mary Daly’s famous dictum was correct when she observed, “If God is male then the male is God.”¹³

This chapter, in support of the dissertation’s main thesis, will argue that feminist Christological exploration and subsequent reconstruction should be rejected and deemed unacceptable for evangelical Christian theology. In so doing, the method followed here will be to demonstrate both the feminist arguments against the maleness of Jesus Christ as well as their alternative proposals for a Christology inclusive of feminist concerns. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a brief evaluation and critique of the contours of feminist Christology presented here, plus an affirmation of the necessity of the maleness of Christ given the patriarchal storyline of Scripture.

Feminist Arguments against the Maleness of Jesus

In light of the opening considerations of this paper, feminists advance numerous arguments against the maleness of Jesus. Feminist concerns touch various

¹¹Hopkins, *Towards a Feminist Christology*, 85.

¹²Anne-Claire Mulder, “Vrouw, Lichaam, Subjectiviteit en het ‘Imago Dei’,” *Mara* 7, no. 1 (1993): 3-13.

¹³Hopkins, *Towards a Feminist Christology*, 85. Daly’s dictum comes from her book *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1973), 19.

aspects of Christian theology as it relates to Christology; namely, anthropology, soteriology, and ecclesiology. The main arguments against the maleness of Jesus, with these broad theological areas in mind, are as follows.

A Tool for the Subordination of Women

Elizabeth Johnson argues that within the worldview of traditional Christology, the historical Jesus,

who was indisputably a male human being, is interpreted as the incarnation of the Logos, an ontological symbol connected with rationality and thus, according to Greek philosophy, with maleness. The Word made flesh is then related to human beings defined according to an androcentric anthropology that sees men as normative and women as derivative.¹⁴

What results is a Christology that functions as a sacred justification for the superiority of men over women. Because of this theological justification, Johnson surmises, “Women are inevitably relegated to a marginal role both in theory and practice, given the priority of the male savior figure within a patriarchal framework.”¹⁵ If the maleness of Jesus is maintained, given such a pronounced anthropological dualism, as feminists argue it has been in the history of the church, then Christology *must* move in “an increasingly misogynist direction that not only excludes woman as representative of Christ in ministry but makes her a second-class citizen in both creation and redemption.”¹⁶

The crux of the issue related to the use of Jesus’ masculinity as a tool for the subordination of women surfaces in the ecclesial reality of a male-dominated ministerial

¹⁴Johnson, “Redeeming the Name of Christ,” 118.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon, 1993), 135.

leadership. Although she overstates her case a bit by claiming that “much of the history of the doctrine of Christ clearly denies the relevance of Jesus’ maleness, uplifting only that Jesus is a human being,” Sondra Stalcup divulges a (perhaps *the*) critically important objection on behalf of feminist theologians:

It is in fact the maleness of Jesus that has been used by the official church to continue the subordination of women by limiting their roles—most obviously, by denying women ordination to the priesthood or representative ministry. Feminists did not create the problem of Jesus’ maleness, the official church did by using it inappropriately as a barrier, as a dividing line against women.¹⁷

The rejection of women from representative ministry as priests or pastors is evidence of the social location of this problematic usage of Jesus’ masculinity against women. That is, feminists argue, in “an ecclesial community where official voice, vote and visibility belong by law only to men,”¹⁸ women’s subordination grounded in “the maleness of Christ as imaged through the centuries has damaged women’s self-esteem by relegating [them] to second-class citizens.”¹⁹ Thus, Johnson avers, “The belief that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us as a male indicates that thanks to their natural bodily resemblance, men enjoy a closer identification with Christ than do women. Men are not only theomorphic but, by virtue of their sex, also christomorphic in a way that goes beyond what is possible for women.”²⁰

¹⁷Sondra Stalcup, “What about Jesus? Christology and the Challenges of Women,” in *Setting the Table*, ed. Rita Nakashima Brock, Claudia Camp, and Serene Jones (St. Louis: Chalice, 1995), 126.

¹⁸Elizabeth A. Johnson, “The Maleness of Christ,” in *The Power of Naming*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 308.

¹⁹Isherwood, *Introducing Feminist Christologies*, 31.

²⁰Johnson, “The Maleness of Christ,” 308.

This male-dominated theology, that relegates woman to inferior status in both creation and redemption, has enjoyed considerable revival in recent years as the keystone of the conservative reaction to the movements for women's ordination (primarily in the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Orthodox traditions),²¹ but finds particular historical support from the theology of Thomas Aquinas.²² Rosemary Radford Ruether argues that Aquinas's position that the male is the normative or generic sex of the human species places women in an inferior status. Aquinas argues that women were inferior to men, and in essence, defective. Thus, for Aquinas, "it follows that the incarnation of the Logos of God into the male is not a historical accident, but an ontological necessity."²³ We might argue, however, that the problem with Aquinas is not his Christology, but his anthropology. Anne Carr clarifies Ruether's objection to Aquinas's Christology:

Little of this argument occurs in Aquinas' treatise on Christology but is derived from his discussions of human nature and sacramental priesthood. Like the rest of the tradition, his Christological statements are general, and emphasize the fullness of the divine and human natures in Christ. Yet when Aquinas' anthropology is incorporated with his Christology, the distortion is clear: the Christological emphasis on the truly human is skewed by androcentric bias.²⁴

So, feminists argue, the fact that Jesus was a *man* is used to legitimize men's superiority over women in the belief that a particular honor, dignity, and normativity accrues to the male sex because it was chosen by the Son of God "himself" in the incarnation. Indeed, Johnson opines, thanks to their gender, men are said to be more

²¹Rosemary Radford Ruether, *To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 45-46.

²²See, e.g., *Summa Theologica*, I, 92, q. 1-2; III (supplement), 39, q. 1; III, q. 1-59; and especially III, 31, q. 4.

²³Ruether, *To Change the World*, 45.

²⁴Carr, *Transforming Grace*, 164.

conformed to the image of Christ than are women. In the end, “women’s physical embodiment thus becomes a prison that shuts them off from full identification with Christ, except as mediated through the christic male. For this mentality, the idea that the Word might have become female flesh is not even seriously imaginable.”²⁵

Inadequate Metaphor/Symbol

As seen above, the claim has been made by feminist theologians that the maleness of Jesus validates the oppression of women. Mary Daly’s scathing insight cuts to the heart of the issue for feminist Christological exploration: “If the symbol [of a masculine Christ] can be ‘used’ [to oppress women] and in fact has a long history of being ‘used’ that way, isn’t this an indication of some inherent deficiency of the symbol itself?”²⁶ Since the Christ symbol (as masculine) has been used against women, Daly (and she is not alone in this) asserts that the symbol must be changed to become more amenable to women.

The biblical referents for Jesus as “Son” and God as “Father” must not be taken to reflect any reality about who God is, it is argued, but should be taken metaphorically to help us understand God in the terms of our own language. Thus, feminists say, the maleness of the historical Jesus has nothing to do with manifesting a male “Son” who, in turn, images a male “Father.” Since the symbol is merely metaphorical, feminists posit that the divine “Father” is equally “Mother,” and the “Son” is equally “Daughter.” Yet even the parental metaphor is lacking according to Ruether: “Perhaps the parental language for transcendence and immanence itself should be

²⁵Johnson, “Redeeming the Name of Christ,” 119.

²⁶Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 72.

relativized by some metaphor other than parent and child to better state this relationship between God transcendent and God manifest in creation and history.”²⁷ Further, the title “Son of God” is an inadequate metaphor for divine immanence, since it has been taken literally and seen as further indication that the Logos is male. These notions of the maleness of God, in turn, affect the Christian interpretation of the *imago dei*.²⁸

Barbara Darling-Smith presents a metaphorical Christology as a solution to this problem. She states, “Through metaphors we make connections between unlike things; metaphors undercut literalism because a metaphor, as a new and unconventional interpretation of reality, means that the two objects both *are* and are not like each other.”²⁹ Sallie McFague also prefers a metaphorical theology, since “all talk of God is indirect: no words or phrases refer directly to God, for God-language can refer only through the detour of a description that properly belongs elsewhere. . . . The point that metaphor underscores is that in certain matters there can be no direct description.”³⁰

So, through metaphorical theology feminists are able to perceive Jesus as a “parable of God.” Darling-Smith says, “As opposed to incarnational Christology, which

²⁷Ruether, “The Liberation of Christology,” 146-47.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 139.

²⁹Barbara Darling-Smith, “A Feminist Christological Exploration,” in *One Faith, Many Cultures*, ed. Ruy O. Costa (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 73, emphasis original.

³⁰Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 34. See also Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982). McFague insists that metaphors are words or phrases used *inappropriately*, as “strategies of desperation” for humans to say something familiar about God’s unfamiliarity. *Idem*, *Models of God*, 33. On metaphor in feminist theology, see also Shannon Schrein, *Quilting and Braiding: The Feminist Christologies of Sallie McFague and Elizabeth Johnson in Conversation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1998), 12-15.

sees Jesus as ‘the Godhead, veiled in flesh,’ parabolic Christology in *not* Jesusolatry. . . . It rejects any idolatry or any identification of a finite creature with God, including Jesus of Nazareth, who both *is* and *is not* God.”³¹ Since a parabolic approach says Jesus is and is not God, it relativizes Jesus’ particularity, viz., his maleness, and at the same time this approach universalizes the God whom Jesus metaphorically represents.³²

The feminist move toward a metaphorical Christology is a strategy against the traditional Christological commitment to a patriarchal worldview. The masculine Christ symbol is part and parcel of the androcentric perspective offered in the Bible. Feminists claim that “since the records about Jesus gathered in the New Testament were written and collected by men for men (so it is claimed), and the canon ratified by hierarchical androcentric political maneuvering, women’s voices were excluded from the canon.”³³ For this reason the Christ symbol is deficient and needs revision. Johnson contends, “Given the intrinsic link between the patriarchal imagination in language and in structures, to liberate Christological language from a monopoly of male images and concepts is to create a necessary, even if not sufficient, condition for further change in the church’s consciousness and social order.”³⁴

Another reason why the symbol is deficient, according to feminist theologians, is that traditional Christology is built upon an androcentric image of deity. Isherwood

³¹Darling-Smith, “A Feminist Christological Exploration,” 73, emphasis original. Darling-Smith uses “metaphorical” and “parabolic” interchangeably.

³²*Ibid.*, 74.

³³Greene-McCreight, *Feminist Reconstructions*, 71.

³⁴Elizabeth A. Johnson, “Wisdom Was Made Flesh and Pitched Her Tent among Us,” in *Reconstructing the Christ Symbol*, ed. Maryanne Stevens (New York: Paulist, 1993), 109.

notes, “While Christianity has never claimed that God was literally male, the Hellenistic underpinning has led to many assumptions about the nature of God and normative humanity. There has been an unspoken, yet enacted, androcentric bias, which has reduced the place of women and men in the world, holding them as it does to very outmoded and reductive notions of humanness.”³⁵ Since the *man* Jesus is confessed to be the revelation of God, the Christ symbol is understood to point to maleness as an essential characteristic of divine being itself. Because this perception is underscored by the exclusive use of father and son metaphors to interpret Jesus’ relationship to God,³⁶ the only option some feminists see is to castrate Christianity from its patriarchal trappings.³⁷

Jeopardy of Women’s Salvation

Although the ecclesial subordination of women from representative ministry (assumed to be grounded in Jesus’ maleness) is the most obvious location of feminist *angst*, Jesus’ masculinity also raises important soteriological concerns for women. The concern for women’s salvation related to the maleness of Jesus is drawn from several important historical affirmations.

First, Johnson reminds us, “the Nicene Creed confesses, ‘*et homo* [man; human] *factus est*’ (‘and was made man’). But if in fact what is meant is *et vir* [male] *factus est*, if maleness is essential for the christic role, then women are cut out of the loop of salvation, for female sexuality was not assumed by the Word made flesh.”³⁸ Indeed,

³⁵Isherwood, *Introducing Feminist Christologies*, 16.

³⁶Johnson, “The Maleness of Christ,” 307.

³⁷Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 71-72.

³⁸Johnson, “The Maleness of Christ,” 308.

the Chalcedonian affirmation that Jesus was “truly God and truly man” could raise this problem, whether or not the maleness of Jesus is a point of necessity “for us and for our salvation.”

Second, given an anthropological dualism (e.g., Aquinas) which essentially elevates male humanity above female humanity, feminists argue, the maleness of Christ puts the salvation of women in jeopardy. Specifically, Gregory of Nazianzus’s famous Christological-soteriological aphorism “What is not assumed is not healed”³⁹ takes on great significance for women. Since Jesus assumed a *male* human nature, what does this mean for women? Johnson believes this has enormous ramifications for women and their inclusion in salvation:

In addition to casting both God and the human race in an androcentric mold, sexist Christology jeopardizes women’s salvation, at least in theory. . . . The early Christian axiom “What is not assumed is not redeemed, but what is assumed is saved by union with God” sums up the insight that Christ’s solidarity with all of humanity is what is crucial for salvation. . . . If maleness is constitutive for the incarnation and redemption, female humanity is not assumed and therefore not saved.⁴⁰

So, to Ruether’s searching question, “Can a male savior save women?”, feminists contend that any interpretation of the maleness of Christ as essential must answer “No,” despite Christian belief in the universality of God’s saving intent.⁴¹

Relevant to this issue is the feminist allegation that Jesus, as a man, was unable to understand the experiences of women, since he did not *assume* a female human nature.

³⁹Gregory of Nazianzus, “To Cledonius Against Apollinaris (Epistle 101),” in *Christology of the Later Fathers*, ed. Edward R. Hardy (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), 218.

⁴⁰Johnson, “Redeeming the Name of Christ,” 119-20.

⁴¹Johnson, “The Maleness of Christ,” 308.

For this reason many have abandoned Christianity because of their misunderstanding of its patriarchal framework. Ruether questions whether Christology can be liberated from patriarchy at all because of its strong link with symbols of male-dominance. She states, “Certainly many feminists have already concluded that the maleness of Christ is so fundamental to Christianity that women cannot see themselves as liberated through him.”⁴² Radical feminists such as Mary Daly or members of the Women’s Spirituality Movement have already declared that women must reject Christ as redeemer for women and seek instead a female deity and messianic symbol.⁴³ So, if there is to be found or constructed a feminist Christology which includes woman as well as man in “the icon of God, the male hegemony must be deconstructed such that the image of God made Flesh is seen and experienced as female as well as male.”⁴⁴ Feminists conclude that the maleness of Christ, as an essential component of the incarnation and revelation of God in human nature, removes women as beneficiaries of salvation. In fact, if Jesus’ maleness is viewed as essential to his messianic identity and function, then “the Christ functions as a religious tool for marginalizing and excluding women.”⁴⁵

Maleness as an Irrelevant Particularity

Aside from the fact that many feminists are willing to admit that the historicity of Jesus’ maleness is important for his mission and ministry (to be discussed below),

⁴²Ruether, *To Change the World*, 47.

⁴³See, e.g., Naomi Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religion* (Boston: Beacon, 1979), chap. 1.

⁴⁴Eleanor McLaughlin, “Feminist Christologies: Re-Dressing the Tradition,” in *Reconstructing the Christ Symbol*, ed. Maryanne Stevens (New York: Paulist, 1993), 121.

⁴⁵Johnson, “The Maleness of Christ,” 307.

others deem “maleness” as an irrelevant particularity of Jesus. Ruether notes that feminists *could* accept Jesus’ particularities, but must not confuse them—especially his maleness—with “the essence of Christ as God’s Word incarnate.” She avers, “what we find in most Christology is an effort to dissolve most aspects of Jesus’ particularity (his Jewishness, as a first-century messianic Galilean) in order to make him the symbol of universal humanity; yet an insistence that the historical particularity of his maleness is essential to his ongoing representation.”⁴⁶

Stalcup is willing to say much more, however. “Theologically, in the matter of understanding the redemptive experience of Jesus as the Christ, *there is no material significance in Jesus’ biological makeup, or in any fact about him in the past. As an event of God, as the eschatological event in every new present, Jesus’ sex—or Judaism or race or marital status or any fact of what he said or did in and of himself—is not relevant in confessing him as the Christ.*”⁴⁷ Perhaps the only reason why any of these particularities are significant—especially Jesus’ being male—is because of the meaning of maleness in patriarchal history and culture.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, even if religious feminists acknowledge that Jesus’ maleness is theologically irrelevant, there is still a problem. Stalcup rightly observes: “In most churches today, the reliance on traditional and historical language and imagery makes it

⁴⁶Ruether, “The Liberation of Christology,” 147.

⁴⁷Stalcup, “What about Jesus?” 127, emphasis mine.

⁴⁸Ellen K. Wondra, *Humanity Has Been a Holy Thing: Toward a Contemporary Feminist Christology* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), 304.

quite difficult to ‘get around’ the maleness issue,” even if it is deemed to be irrelevant to who Jesus was and is.⁴⁹

If Jesus’ maleness was simply accidental, then feminists posit the possibility and cogency of a female incarnation. Johnson is not unique in her conclusion: “Could God have become a human being as a woman? The question strikes some people as silly or worse. Theologically, though, the answer is Yes. Why not? If women are genuinely human and if God is the deep mystery of holy love, then what is to prevent such an incarnation?”⁵⁰

Feminist Alternatives for an “Inclusive” Christology

As previously noted, there is no universally agreed feminist Christology, at least one that addresses all of the critiques targeting traditional Christology. This fact does not mean that there are no available feminist Christological perspectives; on the contrary, a number of explorative, constructive possibilities have been developed.⁵¹ The approaches considered below are not complete Christologies but attempts to conceive Jesus in terms that take women’s experience(s) seriously and offer significant challenges to traditional Christology.

Jesus as Iconoclastic Prophet

One alternative proposal to guard against the maleness of Jesus in traditional Christology is to focus on Jesus’ *message* and not his person. Ruether poses the problem

⁴⁹Stalcup, “What about Jesus?” 127.

⁵⁰Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 197.

⁵¹Greene, *Christology in Cultural Perspective*, 236.

of how we should understand Jesus as a historical individual in all his particularity, without allowing such particularities to limit his representation as the embodiment of God's universal new Word. She offers a solution: "We should do that, not by emphasizing biological particularities, but rather by emphasizing his message as expressed in his ministry. . . . In this perspective we see that the emphasis on Jesus' maleness as essential to his ongoing representation not only is not compatible but is contradictory to the essence of his message as good news to the marginalized *qua* women."⁵²

According to Ruether and other liberation theologians, what is most significant about Jesus is his message of good news to the poor and the marginalized. What is paradigmatic about Jesus is not his biological ontology, but rather his person *as a lived message and practice*. For Ruether, "that message is good news to the poor, a confrontation with systems of religion and society that incarnate oppressive privilege, and an affirmation of the despised as loved and liberated by God."⁵³ The prophetic iconoclastic Christ, represented primarily through liberation theologies (such as feminist theology), shows that Jesus' significance "does not reside in his maleness, but, on the contrary, in the fact that he has renounced this system of [male] domination and seeks to embody in his person the new humanity of service and mutual empowerment."⁵⁴ Johnson concurs, "While Jesus was indeed a first-century Galilean Jewish man, and thus

⁵²Ruether, "The Liberation of Christology," 147.

⁵³Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Can Christology Be Liberated From Patriarchy?" in *Reconstructing the Christ Symbol*, ed. Maryanne Stevens (New York: Paulist, 1993), 23.

⁵⁴Ruether, *To Change the World*, 56.

irredeemably particular, as we all are, what transpires in the Incarnation is inclusive of the humanity of all human beings of all races and historical conditions and both genders.”⁵⁵

Therefore, she insists, Jesus’ ability to be Savior does not reside in his maleness but in his loving, liberating history lived in the midst of the powers of evil and oppression and male-domination.⁵⁶

Envisioning Christ as Female or Androgynous

A second alternative Christological exploration envisions Christ’s humanity in female terms, a proposal that Ellen Leonard claims has a long history in the Christian tradition.⁵⁷ Leonard overstates her case, however, since her “long history” only includes obscure thinkers from medieval spirituality. Notwithstanding the (very) limited and ambiguous historical references for thinking of Jesus in female terms, some contemporary feminists are adopting this approach for Christological reconstruction.

⁵⁵Johnson, “Redeeming the Name of Christ,” 131.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Leonard, “Women and Christ,” 326. She offers these sources for support to this claim: André Cabassut, “Une dévotion médiévale peu connue. La dévotion à Jésus notre mère,” *Revue d’ascétique et de mystique* 25 (1949): 234-45; Eleanor McLaughlin, “‘Christ My Mother’: Feminine Naming and Metaphor in Medieval Spirituality,” *Nashotah Review* 15 (1975): 228-48; and Caroline Walker Bynum’s chapter on “Jesus as Mother and Abbot as Mother: Some Themes in the Twelfth Century Cisterian Writing,” in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982): 110-69. Although Leonard asserts that such important thinkers such as Origen, Ireneaus, Augustine, and Anselm refer to Christ as “mother,” she provides no source for justification. Julian of Norwich, however, is typically held up as a representative historical source for this position, since she developed the image of mother to describe Jesus’ nurturing love for all humanity. Cf. also Joan Gibson, “Could Christ Have Been Born a Woman? A Medieval Debate,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 8, no. 1 (1992): 65-82.

Against all reliable historical accounts, some feminists claim that Jesus was actually genetically female. Citing medical and scientific studies,⁵⁸ evangelical feminists Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty argue that since Jesus was born of a virgin and had only one human parent, a female, he “was undoubtedly genetically female even though phenotypically male. . . . His genes must have been XX rather than XY . . . Thus, [at the least] Jesus may well have been biologically both male and female.”⁵⁹ In this view, the incarnation unwittingly subverts the patriarchal structure into which Jesus was born—and satisfies the feminist notion that the Messiah could be a woman—through the bearded-woman from Galilee!

Four objections are in order. First, this position is extremely rare. While many feminists downplay or reject the importance of Jesus’ maleness, most at least recognize the historical fact that he was a human male. Second, this view brazenly disregards the clear biblical representation of Christ as male. The narrative of Jesus Christ in the Gospels is reduced to absurdity, given the exclusivity of male pronouns and titles attributed to Jesus Christ, if such a recasting of Jesus is taken seriously. Third, Millard Erickson argues that it is possible that Mary did not contribute anything in the incarnation (not even an ovum), but that God could have implanted in her an already fertilized ovum.⁶⁰ Fourth, Jack Cottrell notes that while a process such as this is possible (which he

⁵⁸E.g., Edward L. Kessel, “A Proposed Biological Interpretation of the Virgin Birth,” *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 35 (1983): 129-36.

⁵⁹Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Nancy A. Hardesty, *All We’re Meant to Be: A Biblical Approach to Women’s Liberation* (Waco: Word, 1974), 71.

⁶⁰Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 546. This speculation has problems as well, viz., if this was the case, then in what way is Jesus a human like us? Or better, in what way is Jesus like us as humans tied to the genealogical lineage of Adam? Cf. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids:

calls parthenogenesis), and would produce offspring that are of the same gender as the parent (like cloning), “the virgin birth, however, is not a purely natural event but an intensely supernatural act on the part of God. . . . The very fact that his maleness required a special miracle demonstrates the truth that the maleness of the Messiah was a deliberate choice on the part of God.”⁶¹

Although the proposal of Scanzoni and Hardesty is rare, they point to a more common feminist consideration for including the female into the incarnation, and that is the idea of Jesus as androgynous. The androgynous Christ, feminists claim, is represented in church history through people like Julian of Norwich, the Shakers, and some forms of Pietism. All androgynous Christologies exhibit a sense that a masculinist Christ is inadequate to express full human redemption; thus, Christ must in some way represent both male and female.⁶²

Zondervan, 1994), 529-32.

⁶¹Jack Cottrell, “The Gender of Jesus and the Incarnation: A Case Study in Feminist Hermeneutics,” 7 [on-line]; accessed 11 April 2006; available from http://www.cbmw.org/images/articles_pdf/cottrell_jack/genderofjesus.pdf; Internet. Originally published in *Stone-Campbell Journal* 3 (2000): 171-94.

⁶²Ruether, *To Change the World*, 49 and 53. Some feminist theologians press this consideration further by seeking to liberate Jesus from the gender duality of heterosexuality altogether, either in terms of perceiving Jesus as “transvestite” or in terms of a homosexual theological perspective (i.e., queer theology). See Eleanor McLaughlin, “Christology in Dialogue with Feminist Ideology—Bodies and Boundaries,” in *Christology in Dialogue*, ed. Robert F. Berkey and Sarah A. Edwards (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1993), 329-34; Lisa Isherwood, *Liberating Christ* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1999); Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood, eds., *The Sexual Theologian: Essays on Sex, God and Politics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2005); and Halvor Moxnes, “Jesus in Gender Trouble,” *Cross Currents* 54, no. 3 (2004): 31-46.

Not all feminists agree that an androgynous Christ is the way to conceive of feminist Christology, however. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza argues that androgynous Christologies do not challenge “the Western cultural sex/gender system and its androcentric language,” and since they do not say enough, other alternatives should be offered.⁶³ Ruether is also critical of androgynous Christologies because they simply mask the real problem: “The very concept of androgyny presupposes a psychic dualism that identifies maleness with one-half of human capacities and femaleness with the other. As long as Christ is still presumed to be, normatively, a male person, androgynous Christologies will carry an androcentric bias.”⁶⁴ Nevertheless, androgynous Christology is increasingly popular among feminists as an explanation for incarnation in light of Jesus’ maleness.

Relocation of Christ to the Community

A more radical solution for feminist Christological reconstruction is a complete redefinition of what “Christ” is. Some feminists go so far as to dislocate Christianity from the historical person Jesus Christ altogether. Rita Nakashima Brock asserts that “Jesus Christ need not be the authoritative center of a feminist Christian faith.”⁶⁵ Brock relocates Christ in the community of which Jesus is one historical part, such that it is the

⁶³Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam’s Child, Sophia’s Prophet* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 47.

⁶⁴Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 130. See also Greene’s discussion, *Christology in Cultural Perspective*, 234-36.

⁶⁵Rita Nakashima Brock, “The Feminist Redemption of Christ,” in *Christian Feminism: Visions of a New Humanity*, ed. Judith L. Weidman (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 68. See also Tom Driver, *Christ in a Changing World: Toward a Ethical Christology* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

community, not Jesus, that is the locus of redemption.⁶⁶ Brock is clear that Jesus has been eclipsed by “Christa/Community”:

The feminist Christian commitment is not to a savior who redeems us by bringing God to us. Our commitment is to love ourselves and others into wholeness. Our commitment is to a divine presence with us here and now, a presence that works through the mystery of our deepest selves and our relationships, constantly healing us and nudging us toward a wholeness of existence we only fitfully know. That healed wholeness is not Christ; it is ourselves.⁶⁷

When feminists remove the exclusive, perfect God-man Jesus Christ from the center of Christology, women may reclaim themselves and, then, reclaim the historical Jesus. Brock states, “We may reclaim Jesus as a remarkable man for his time. De-divinizing him allows us to appreciate his remarkability without his humanity or theology being the measuring rod for our existence.”⁶⁸ Likewise, Pamela Young agrees, “Christology is not first and foremost about Jesus in himself, but about the experience of God’s grace that the first followers had in their relation to him.”⁶⁹ Thus, feminists contend, Jesus’ historical identity is not significant for Christology. Jesus becomes irrelevant for Christology, except for the prophetic message that he embodied. In this way, his particulars, especially his maleness, “[do] not constitute the essence of Christ, but, in the Spirit, redeemed and redeeming humanity does,”⁷⁰ since the community of the

⁶⁶Leonard, “Women and Christ,” 333.

⁶⁷Brock, “The Feminist Redemption of Christ,” 69.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Pamela Dickey Young, “Encountering Jesus through the Earliest Witnesses,” *Theological Studies* 57 (1996): 517. In addition, Young argues that one’s encounter with and relationship to God does not need to be found exclusively through Jesus, even though the early community may have held this view; *ibid.*, 519.

⁷⁰Johnson, “Redeeming the Name of Christ,” 129.

baptized now embodies the same message. Feminists conclude, then, that Christ is quite accurately portrayed as black, old, Gentile, female, Asian, Polish, or whatever the demographic of the community exhibits.⁷¹ Ruether concurs: “Christ, as redemptive person and Word of God, is not to be encapsulated ‘once-for-all’ in the historical Jesus. The Christian community continues Christ’s identity. As vine and branches Christic personhood continues in our sisters and brothers.”⁷²

Closely aligned with this Christological reconstruction is the argument that Jesus’ significance is tied to his iconoclastic prophetism. By prioritizing the message and not the gendered person of Jesus, Christians become a “redemptive community not by passively receiving a redemption ‘won’ by Christ alone, but rather by collectively embodying this path of liberation in a way that transforms people and social systems,” men and women alike.⁷³ Some religious feminists intricately link this ongoing redemptive work with the Christian community. In as much as it embodies the message of Jesus, redemption is carried on and communicated through the community.

So, as Ruether argues as representative of religious feminism in general: “Christ can take on the face of every person and group and their diverse liberation struggles. Feminists insist that we must be able to encounter Christ as black, as Asian, as Aboriginal, as woman. The coming Christ, then, the uncompleted future of redemption,

⁷¹Schneiders, *Women and the Word*, 54.

⁷²Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 138.

⁷³Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Introducing Redemption in Christian Feminism* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield, 1998), 93. See also Isherwood, *Introducing Feminist Christologies*, 23.

is not the historical Jesus returned, but rather the fullness of all this human diversity gathered together in redemptive community.”⁷⁴

Jesus as Incarnation of Female Deity

A final alternative for Christology explores the notion of Jesus as the incarnation of feminine divinity, namely *Sophia*. This alternative is probably the most influential and substantive of the proposals offered by feminists. Although the subject of Jesus as the incarnation of *Sophia*, or wisdom, merits its own treatment, a brief examination will be presented here.⁷⁵ Wisdom Christology provides a *textual* alternative to traditional Christology, and many religious and evangelical feminists find this proposal attractive.⁷⁶ Indeed, “Sophia” has become an important theological construct over the past few decades years in feminist theology.⁷⁷ Greene-McCreight observes that this

⁷⁴Ruether, “Can Christology Be Liberated?” 23-24.

⁷⁵For a basic introduction, see Denis Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God: An Ecological Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995); Martin Scott, *Sophia and the Johannine Jesus* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield, 1992); Karen Jo Torjesen, “‘You Are the Christ’: Five Portraits of Jesus from the Early Church,” in *Jesus at 2000*, ed. Marcus J. Borg (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997), 73-88; Robert L. Wilken, ed., *Aspects of Wisdom in Judaism and Early Christianity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975); and Michael E. Willett, *Wisdom Christology in the Fourth Gospel* (San Francisco: Mellen, 1992).

⁷⁶Such as Rebecca D. Pentz, “Jesus as Sophia,” *Reformed Journal* 38, no. 12 (1988): 17-22; Gail Paterson Corrington, *Her Image of Salvation: Female Saviors and Formative Christianity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 103-44; Jann Aldredge-Clanton, *In Search of the Christ-Sophia* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third, 1995); and Mary Grey, *Introducing Feminist Images of God*, (Sheffield, England: Sheffield, 2001), 100-10.

⁷⁷Greene-McCreight, *Feminist Reconstructions*, 86-87. Greene-McCreight traces the development and inclusion of Sophia on the popular and academic levels. Of course, it was not feminists who first “discovered” a Sophia-Christology in the New Testament. See M. Jack Suggs, *Wisdom, Christology and Law in Matthew’s Gospel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970); Felix Christ, *Jesus Sophia: Die*

perspective cannot be passed off as mere flight of imaginative fancy. While creative feminist Christology makes much use of the imagination in theological reflection, the proposal of Jesus as Sophia incarnate is grounded in historical and biblical reconstructions of the feminine divine.⁷⁸

Some feminists prefer to see the biblical canon itself as the vehicle which allows for and encourages the reemergence of the feminine divine.⁷⁹ Feminists appeal to biblical texts such as Job 28, Proverbs 8, Luke 11:49, Matthew 23:34 and 1 Corinthians 1:24, 30 for evidence of a Sophia tradition within the canon itself.⁸⁰ Greene-McCreight declares, "It is thus the scriptures themselves which lean toward the emergence of Sophia, and the reemergence of Sophia can therefore be furthered by careful examination and rereading of biblical texts."⁸¹

When feminists interpret the incarnation in terms of the enfleshing of the *Sophia*/wisdom of God, the woman-ness of God actually takes historical shape in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus in his embodied existence expresses the intimate, seeking, embracing, longing, passionate consummating lure of the divine Wisdom of

Sophia Christologie bei Den Synoptikern (Zurich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1970); and James Robinson, "Jesus as Sophos and Sophia," in *Aspects of Wisdom in Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Robert L. Wilken (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 1-16. See also Lilan Calles Barger, *Chasing Sophia: Reclaiming the Lost Wisdom of Jesus* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007).

⁷⁸Greene-McCreight, *Feminist Reconstructions*, 87.

⁷⁹See, e.g., Corrington, *Her Image of Salvation*; and Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet*.

⁸⁰Many feminists also include John 1 in this list by arguing that the Logos is actually Sophia.

⁸¹Greene-McCreight, *Feminist Reconstructions*, 91-92.

God. As Johnson suggests, such a Christology has the potential not only to relativize traditional Christology, with its androcentric bias, but also to present a Jesus who is both male and female.⁸²

Johnson believes that using the female figure of personified Wisdom to speak about Jesus as the Christ facilitates an inclusive rather than exclusive interpretation of the incarnation. The foundational metaphor of “Jesus, the Wisdom of God” relieves the monopoly of the male metaphors of Logos and Son and destabilizes patriarchal imagination. “Whoever espouses a wisdom Christology,” Johnson states, “is asserting that Sophia in all her fullness was in Jesus so that in his historicity he embodies divine mystery in creative and saving involvement with the world.”⁸³ Here we seem to be getting at the heart of the matter, for the metaphor “Son” and the relation between Father and Son have been the controlling categories of classical Christology. Feminists insist that when we release the symbol of Wisdom from subordination to Word or Son, different possibilities for Christology open up to us. So, according to this feminist explanation of the incarnation, Jesus is the human being whom Sophia became.⁸⁴

The importance of Jesus as Sophia incarnate becomes clear with reference to the subject of this dissertation: Jesus as Sophia incarnate “breaks the stranglehold of

⁸²Johnson, “Wisdom Was Made Flesh,” 108. See also Elizabeth A. Johnson, “Jesus, the Wisdom of God: A Biblical Basis for a Non-Androcentric Christology,” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovaniensis* 61 (1985): 261-94.

⁸³Johnson, “Redeeming the Name of Christ,” 127. Johnson promotes a narrow understanding of wisdom Christology, however. Russell Moore contends that Jesus is “the incarnate Wisdom of God,” not as Sophia enfleshed, but as the embodiment of God’s creative power and wisdom. Russell D. Moore, “Natural Revelation,” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007), 109.

⁸⁴Johnson, “Wisdom Was Made Flesh,” 107-08.

androcentric thinking which fixates on the maleness of Jesus, the male metaphors of Logos and Son, and the relationship between Father and Son. This leads to the situation where gender is de-centered, where it is not constitutive for the Christian doctrine of incarnation or for speech about Christ.”⁸⁵ For feminists, Christ as incarnate wisdom has genuine possibilities for an inclusive Christology. They argue, however, since the Jewish understanding of Sophia and the Christian view of Jesus as Sophia developed within a patriarchal social structure, the resulting theology and Christology in the biblical record are not truly inclusive.⁸⁶ That is, “The male human incarnation overwhelms the female divine persona of Sophia.”⁸⁷

Two objections to the feminist position of Wisdom Christology need to be raised. First, feminists are inconsistent on whether Sophia is actually the God of traditional theism. For example, Brock claims that “Wisdom, or Sophia, is not currently a feminine equivalent to Yahweh or logos, though we might work to make her so.”⁸⁸ But Fiorenza and Johnson both assert (in response to the allegation that their views are “pagan”) that “Wisdom theology does not posit a second divine power to compete with Yahweh but takes up the language of pagan goddesses to speak of Yahweh, thus, in effect, subverting paganism.”⁸⁹ The latter case seems to say that Sophia is just another

⁸⁵Ibid., 108.

⁸⁶Leonard, “Women and Christ,” 329-30.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 61.

⁸⁹Greene-McCreight, *Feminist Reconstructions*, 93. See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 134; and Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, 10th anniv.

name for Yahweh, the God of the Bible. Ultimately, as discussed above, the term is metaphorical; so as long as Sophia, or the feminine is represented as divinity, feminists may conclude either way and still retain the force of their reconstruction.

Second, Douglas McCready clarifies that “Wisdom” in the Scriptures (e.g., Prov 8) is a personification and is a created entity. The Wisdom literature, particularly “Proverbs, the Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus describe the wisdom of God in personified language, yet these personifications do not appear to be or to be intended to be persons or hypostases.”⁹⁰ Other New Testament scholars, such as F. F. Bruce, N. T. Wright, Ben Witherington III, and Martin Hengel agree that Paul applied and modified everything previously attributed to Wisdom to Christ.⁹¹ Thus, the feminist position that Jesus is Sophia incarnate is nothing but conjecture. There is no suggestion in the New Testament anywhere that Jesus is the incarnation of some female deity. While on the surface this alternative Christological proposal from feminist theologians seems attractive

ed. (New York: Crossroad, 2002), 90-93.

⁹⁰Douglas McCready, *He Came Down From Heaven* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 61; cf. 145-46 and 176-78. See also Cottrell, “The Gender of Jesus,” 8.

⁹¹McCready, *He Came Down From Heaven*, 82-85. Cf. Ben Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 161-96. Also important in this discussion is Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 126-33. Waltke demonstrates that there is no “straight trajectory in Hellenistic Jewish wisdom literature moving from Wisdom in Proverbs 8” to Jesus Christ. *Ibid.*, 128. Also see Karen H. Jobes, “Sophia Christology: The Way of Wisdom?” in *The Way of Wisdom: Essays in Honor of Bruce K. Waltke*, ed. J. I. Packer and Sven K. Soderlund (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 226-50; and Gordon D. Fee, “Wisdom Christology in Paul: A Dissenting View,” in *The Way of Wisdom: Essays in Honor of Bruce K. Waltke*, ed. J. I. Packer and Sven K. Soderlund (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 251-79.

because of its appeal to biblical texts, the proposal is unacceptable on the grounds that it cannot sustain itself under proper biblical exegesis and sound hermeneutics.

Evaluation and Critique

Although feminist arguments against the maleness of Jesus and their Christological reconstructions are extreme in response to traditional Christological claims, several important fundamental critiques from feminists deserve clarification. Feminists raise important questions related to theological anthropology (especially the nature of the image of God in humanity), soteriology, and theology proper (especially the nature of God's essence).

Answering Feminist Anthropological Concerns

Mary McClintock Fulkerson claims, "The topic of the *imago Dei* is in many respects at the heart of feminist theology."⁹² In light of this claim, Mary Aquin O'Neill summarizes the feminist anthropological concern regarding the question "What does our faith teach us about the mystery of being human?":

As soon as the question is framed . . . it becomes problematic, for there are no generic human beings. There are, simply, male and female human beings. In the initial question, then, three issues are embedded: (1) Christian belief and experience about humanity as such; (2) Christian belief and experience about male human being; and (3) Christian belief and experience about female human being. For too long, Christian anthropology constructed by men has resulted in a conflation of the first issue and the second. The result has been a description of "human being" at

⁹²Mary McClintock Fulkerson, "The *Imago Dei* and a Reformed Logic for Feminist/Womanist Critique," in *Feminist and Womanist Essays in Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Amy Plantinga Pauw and Serene Jones (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 95.

once more reflective of the male angle on reality and less in touch with the fullness of Christian revelation and experience.⁹³

The feminist contention is that theological anthropology has been considered only by men, for men. As such, the *imago Dei* takes on a distinctly (exclusively?) masculine character. But feminist theology, motivated and expressed by *women's* experience, not only rejects the dominance of the male in theological matters, but attempts to reassert a feminine voice that has been suppressed in the Christian tradition, particularly in addressing the question, “what does it mean to be human?”.

Whereas feminists react negatively to the theological anthropology of Thomas Aquinas, evangelicals may also stand against such erroneous thinking. Aquinas wrongly argued that women are inferior to men biologically; in essence, women are defective males.⁹⁴ Further, Aquinas insisted, such an anthropology affects incarnational Christology and also ecclesiology. Since the male better represents God, Christ could have been only a man, and consequently, only men can represent Christ in ministerial occupation. Sadly, on the basis of such thinking, church and society have played a significant role in the subordination of women.

In response, Christian theology may affirm—even in a patriarchal, complementarian worldview—the biblical doctrine of the image of God as male *and* female, without distortion, neither in a chauvinistic nor a feminist interpretation.⁹⁵

Complementarians affirm the biblical truth that women reflect the image of God, as do

⁹³Mary Aquin O’Neill, “The Mystery of Being Human Together,” in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 140.

⁹⁴See n. 22 above.

⁹⁵Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 454-71.

men (Gen 1:27).⁹⁶ Yet, essential equality and dignity as the shared image of God does not mean that men and women do not have distinct and different roles and functions, especially in the home and in the church.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, complementarian evangelicals might agree with Aquinas's conclusions about the necessity of Christ as male and about exclusive male pastoral leadership; however, since his basis for such conclusions is unacceptable biblically, evangelicals must find other arguments to support these conclusions.

Answering Feminist Soteriological Concerns

Feminists also raise an important soteriological concern. When traditional Christology upholds the necessity of Jesus' maleness, feminists contend that the salvation

⁹⁶Not even Paul's discussion in 1 Cor 11:3-9 can be taken as a denial that women are made in the image of God. Paul's statement in verse 7, "[man] is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man" does not imply that the woman is not also the image of God. In fact, Paul is not engaged in a discussion of the *imago Dei* here, but rather the nature of authority in marital relationships and in the church. See Thomas R. Schreiner, "Head Coverings, Prophecies and the Trinity: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 124-39. Further, Paul's discussion in vv. 8-12 is reminiscent of the creation of man and woman in Gen 1-2, both in God's image.

⁹⁷For more on the issue of gender distinctions and roles related to the image of God: Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986); John M. Frame, "Men and Women in the Image of God," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991): 225-32; and Bruce A. Ware, "Male and Female Complementarity and the Image of God," in *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 71-92. For egalitarian responses, see Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), chap. 1; and Richard S. Hess, "Equality with and without Innocence: Genesis 1-3," in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 79-95.

of women is in jeopardy. Assuming complete egalitarianism, feminists cannot allow the traditional claim for the necessity of Jesus' maleness. Once the inappropriate Thomistic anthropology identified by feminists is answered, there is little basis to allege that Jesus, as a male, cannot be the savior of all people, including women.

As mentioned previously, feminists repudiate the Gregorian aphorism—"what is not assumed is not redeemed"—but in turn use this perfunctory statement as a weapon against biblical soteriology. Their point is well taken, however, in so far as it is understood with more contextual and theological precision. First, Gregory of Nazianzus's phrase arose in his discussion of the full humanity of Jesus in contrast to the Apollinarian view. His full statement reads:

If anyone has put his trust in him as a man without a human mind, he is really bereft of mind, and quite unworthy of salvation. For that which he has not assumed he has not healed; but that which is united to his Godhead is also saved. If only half Adam fell, then that which Christ assumes and saves may be half also; but if the whole of his nature fell, it must be united to the whole nature of Him that was begotten, and so be saved as a whole. Let them not, then, begrudge us our complete salvation, or clothe the Saviour only with bones and nerves and the portraiture of humanity. For if his manhood is without soul, even the Arians admit this, that they may attribute his Passion to the Godhead, as that which gives motion to the body is also that which suffers. But if he has a soul, and yet is without a mind, how is he man, for man is not a mindless animal? And this would necessarily involve that while his form and tabernacle was human, his soul should be that of a horse or an ox, or some other of the brute creation. This, then, would be what he saves; and I have been deceived by the truth, and led to boast of an honor which had been bestowed upon another. But if his manhood is intellectual and not without mind, let them cease to be thus really mindless.⁹⁸

Gregory's point is that unless Jesus was *fully* human—body and soul—then he cannot provide full salvation for humanity. Clearly, feminist theologians have misappropriated Gregory's phrase to suit (and to explode) their own theological agenda—to stave off the

⁹⁸Gregory of Nazianzus, "To Cledonius Against Apollinaris (Epistle 101)," 218-19.

necessity of Jesus' maleness from Christian soteriology. Ironically, feminist theologians have denied their "full humanity" by not declaring that they are "human" and thus assumed in Christ's human nature.

Second, additional theological precision must be provided in light of the feminist claim that a male Savior cannot provide salvation for that which he has not assumed, namely female humanity. Jack Cottrell notes that "orthodox Christian thought has always affirmed the full human nature of Jesus . . . and this human nature has always been recognized as male."⁹⁹ The terminology that Jesus "assumed" a male human nature needs clarification, however. Cottrell offers elucidation: "though the Logos did not *assume* a particular male individual [which would be the view of Apollinaris], he did *become* a particular human male individual, namely, Jesus of Nazareth."¹⁰⁰ But the question still remains as to why Jesus assumed a *male* human nature.

Oliver Crisp, in his discussion of the human nature of Christ, defends the view that human nature is not fundamentally a property, but a concrete particular made up of a human body and a distinct soul. This view is offered in contrast to the alternative theory of an abstract or generic human nature.¹⁰¹ Crisp notes, "A concrete-nature view is one that states that Christ's human nature is a concrete particular, perhaps a human body, but, traditionally, a human body and human soul distinct from the Word. An abstract-nature view says that Christ's human nature is a property, or set of properties, necessary and

⁹⁹Cottrell, "The Gender of Jesus," 9.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Oliver D. Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity: The Incarnation Reconsidered* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 71.

sufficient for being human.”¹⁰² He continues, “The important difference between concrete- and abstract-nature views of Christ’s humanity on this matter is that the advocate of a concrete-nature view thinks that the human nature of Christ is a concrete particular assumed by the Word, not just a property possessed by the Word.”¹⁰³

Thomas Morris’s discussion of the human nature of Christ presents a nuanced view on this point. Morris’s thesis is that Jesus was fully human, but not merely human,¹⁰⁴ disrupting the objection that Jesus cannot be both human and divine. He makes a distinction between common and essential human properties, arguing that God incarnate took upon himself essential human properties. Thus, he contends, “To be a human being is to exemplify human nature. An individual is fully human just in case he fully exemplifies human nature. . . . [A]ccording to orthodox christology [*sic*], Jesus was fully human without being merely human. He had all the properties constitutive of human nature.”¹⁰⁵ Morris does not discuss human nature in embodied terms like Crisp, however. Instead, he claims, humanity’s “kind-nature” or essential [abstract] human properties is sufficient for what it means to be “human.”

Morris’s view, however, is typically adopted by evangelicals warding off feminist criticisms that a male Savior cannot save females. Evangelicals seem content to say that Jesus is able to save women on the grounds that he took a common, or generic, human nature shared between genders. For example, Cottrell says, “This means that there

¹⁰²Ibid., 41.

¹⁰³Ibid., 46.

¹⁰⁴Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1986), 62-67.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 66.

is no basis for the claim or the fear that if the identity of Christ is that of male, then in the incarnation he represents males only and is able to redeem males only. The common human nature of both sexes is fully represented by either sex.”¹⁰⁶

But Morris’s view does not say enough, as compared with Crisp’s view which insists that human nature is linked inextricably with a human body and soul. The importance of this distinction for Christology, and for the purpose of this chapter, is that a concrete human nature includes a body, and by definition, a gender. Therefore, by extension of Crisp’s view, there is no such thing as a genderless human nature, which means that God incarnate necessarily assumed a gender.

Although this conclusion may seem to compound the soteriological problem submitted by feminists, evangelicals must insist, biblically and theologically, that the maleness of Jesus—essential to his human nature—assumes the redemption of women.

Bruce Ware concludes,

Women need not fear that since Christ did not come as a woman he cannot understand them, because in coming as a man, he came as a human being and so understands the human natures common to men and women alike. . . . Christ the man shared our (common) human nature, so that men and women alike can have full confidence that he understands our plight (e.g., Heb 2:18; 4:15-16). So, while Scripture clearly indicates Christ came as a man . . . we also realize that his coming as a man was therefore also as a human. As a man, he partook of our nature to live a human life and bear our sins. Christ the man, yes. But, Christ in the human nature of every man and woman, also, yes.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶Cottrell, “The Gender of Jesus,” 9, emphasis original.

¹⁰⁷Bruce A. Ware, “Could Our Savior Have Been a Woman?” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 8, no. 1 (2003): 38. Ware seems to amalgamate the views represented by Morris and Crisp. Similarly, Brian Leftow argues, “To be a human being is surely to be a person ‘owning’ a human body, soul, mind and will. If this is right, then someone acquires the property of being human only if that person comes to ‘own’ the full human natural endowment: that is, abstract-nature incarnation takes place only if concrete-nature incarnation does. Equally, concrete-nature incarnation takes place only if abstract-nature incarnation does: God has not done what he wanted to do by taking

Answering Feminist Theological Concerns

Finally, religious feminists raise an important theological concern related to the ontology of God. Elizabeth Johnson states, “Jesus’ historical maleness is used to reinforce an exclusively male image of God. If Jesus as a man is the revelation of God, so the usually implicit reasoning goes, then this points to maleness as an essential characteristic of divine being itself.”¹⁰⁸ Religious feminists assume that if Jesus is male, and if he is God incarnate, then God is male. The problem is not, as they see it, the divinity of Jesus, nor even his humanity, but his maleness.¹⁰⁹ Greene-McCreight clarifies:

Here is the problem: the maleness of Jesus “leaks” into the Godhead like an infectious disease, rendering unclear our understanding of God and therefore also our understanding of our own maleness and femaleness. Now, decades after Mary Daly’s charge that “if God is male then male is God,” as the result of its tacit acceptance across the denominational spectrum of American Christianity, we have seen numerous revisions of prayerbooks and hymnals, new “translations” and paraphrases of the scriptures, not to mention the reworkings of Christology such as we have seen here. This is done with the intent of plugging up and blocking the leaking masculinity of Jesus from infecting the Godhead, thus preventing the perception of the masculinity of God from deifying the human male.¹¹⁰

on a human natural endowment unless by doing so he comes to exemplify the property of being human. So one could not believe in abstract-nature incarnation without also believing in concrete, and vice-versa. But the symmetry ends there. One does not usually interact directly with properties, ‘assuming’ or ‘exemplifying’ them. Concrete things act, and in virtue of their activities, they come to exemplify properties. Abstract-nature incarnation can take place only *by* concrete-nature incarnation. In this sense, the concrete-nature view of the incarnation has to be basic.” Brian Leftow, “A Timeless God Incarnate,” in *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 279, emphasis original. See also Crisp’s response, *Divinity and Humanity*, 68-69. Also important for consideration: Dorothy L. Sayers, *Are Women Human?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 19-50.

¹⁰⁸Johnson, “Redeeming the Name of Christ,” 119.

¹⁰⁹Greene-McCreight, *Feminist Reconstructions of Christian Doctrine*, 73.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

Johnson concludes, “The basic problem identified from the feminist academic perspective is that Jesus Christ has been interpreted within a patriarchal framework, with the result that the good news of the gospel for all has been twisted into the bad news of masculine privilege.”¹¹¹

What is the answer to the charge that if Jesus is male, and if Jesus is God, then God is male? Perhaps we should understand that God has chosen to reveal himself in a certain way, using certain language to define himself. Ware argues, “Now, it is true that God is not in essence male, so also is it true that neither the eternal Father nor the eternal Son is male; neither the divine essence, nor the eternal Persons of the God-head are gendered, literally and really.” He continues, “So, why is the First Person of the Trinity the eternal ‘Father,’ and the Second Person, the eternal ‘Son’? Must this not be the language God has chosen to indicate the type of eternal relationship that exists between the first and second Persons?”¹¹² More should be said, however, regarding the incarnational propriety of the preexistent, eternal Son of God taking on male persona and not female persona specifically. It seems like a contradiction in terms to argue that a *son* might make himself as a *daughter*. The contention of this chapter, and dissertation, is that eternal divine realities, not female ontological differences or problems, stand behind the necessity of Christ’s incarnation into a male body. In support of this assertion, is the biblical data itself regarding messianic prophecy and fulfillment (e.g., Isa 7:14; 9:6-7).¹¹³

¹¹¹Johnson, “Redeeming the Name of Christ,” 118.

¹¹²Ware, “Could Our Savior Have Been a Woman?” 33. See also Kärkkäinen, *Christology*, 197.

¹¹³A fuller treatment of a biblical, canonical Christology that upholds the necessity of Jesus’ maleness will be presented in the section “Loss of Textual Approach” below.

With feminist concerns presented and answered, two major critiques contravene the feminist criticisms of and alternatives to classical Christology. First, much of feminist reconstruction may be attributed to an illegitimate starting point for theology; namely, women's experience. A second critique concerns the loss of a textual approach (with proper exegetical and hermeneutical issues included) for Christology, which results in erroneous conclusions about the maleness of Jesus.

**Faulty Starting Point:
Women's Experience**

Given a hermeneutic of suspicion towards Scripture and the Christian tradition, feminist theologians see women's experience as a new, legitimate focus of theological concern and inquiry.¹¹⁴ The problem is, however, that it is very difficult to define what is meant by *women's* experience. Nevertheless, feminists insist that women's experience is normative for constructive Christian theology, and thus, is essential to the formulation of an inclusive Christology. Isherwood raises the critical feminist assumption here:

If [Jesus] was fully a man, to argue that he was fully human negates the place of female experience in humanness, and he did not know how it felt to be a woman. If he did somehow experience being both male and female, then he was either transgendered or not fully human. Being human is an experience and that experience is, in our day, and was in the time of Jesus, a gendered experience.¹¹⁵

The error here is to assume that someone who is fully male (and presumably, someone who is fully female) would not possess this full properties of human nature. Cottrell rightly argues that a "fully male (or female) individual possesses the common human nature but also possesses something *in addition to it*: maleness (or femaleness). Being

¹¹⁴Greene, *Christology in Cultural Perspective*, 225.

¹¹⁵Isherwood, *Introducing Feminist Christologies*, 21.

male, as was Jesus, in no way subtracts from the fullness of humanity shared by males and females alike. Eliminating his maleness does not make him *more* human; it makes him *less* than human.”¹¹⁶ Although Cottrell argues for a common human nature (like Morris), the remainder of this statement is precisely the point argued by Crisp: without gender Jesus ceases to be fully human. Again, gender is not a secondary trait like eye or hair color, height or weight, etc. Isherwood is, perhaps inadvertently, correct: gender is intrinsic to what it means to be human.

Certainly we could take Isherwood’s contention to its logical conclusion. Since Jesus did not know “how it felt” to be a heroine addict, diabetic, a white male, homosexual, handicapped, geriatric, Albino, quadriplegic, deaf, etc., then are none of these able to be redeemed by Jesus? He did not “assume” any of these particularities in his flesh. It seems, contextually, then, if what Jesus “assumed” is saved, then only Jewish males will be redeemed. But the issue is much greater than simply the issues of *women’s* salvation in Jesus; the issue is whether or not Jesus is the Messiah at all, and the savior of the world.

This point is exactly where feminists go awry related to the *humanity* of Jesus, especially with reference to their reaction to historical statements related to Christology, such as Jesus was “truly God and truly man” and “what he has not assumed he has not healed.” The point they miss is that Jesus has taken upon himself in a male incarnation a human nature inclusive of all people, male and female alike.¹¹⁷ This does not mean that Jesus was androgynous, however, since he was a male. What this does mean—and this

¹¹⁶Cottrell, “The Gender of Jesus,” 9.

¹¹⁷See Leftow, “A Timeless God Incarnate,” 273-302.

would relieve many of the feminist arguments of their potency—is that Jesus became a *human being* in order to represent our race, including women (Rom 5:12-21).

Loss of Textual Approach

In tandem with the normativity of women's experience for theological construction is the propensity among feminists to jettison the Bible altogether. A common criticism of the Bible is that it is nothing more than an androcentric, patriarchal document, created by men and for men, and as a result it is not acceptable for women as a source of authority. In fact, many feminists who decry the masculine images for God and Christ suggest that for a genuine theology of liberation for women, the Bible and its Christ need to be left behind.¹¹⁸ Not all feminists want to surrender the Bible to traditional Christianity, however. The Bible carries enormous political and social power that many feminists want to harness for their own theological agendas and explorations. Carter Heyward contends that feminists must “claim the authority to play freely with both Scripture and subsequent tradition” in order to re-image Jesus and validate their experiences as women.¹¹⁹ She concludes, “To re-image Jesus [involves] letting go of old images . . . it is to sketch images of Jesus within, and for the benefit of, our communities—of seminarians, women, gay people, black people, poor people, whoever our people are. Our images do not necessarily reflect Mark's image, or John's, or Augustine's, or Luther's.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁸Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods*, 22.

¹¹⁹Carter Heyward, *The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relation* (New York: University Press of America, 1980), 30.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*

The loss of a textually defined Christ opens up descriptors for who Jesus is, or ought to be, that are inappropriate for Christology. Yet some feminists argue that other cultures or demographics inculturate Jesus into their own language and culture. If this is the case, then why cannot women do the same thing? Teresa Berger notes, “It is worth thinking about why we have become so accustomed to a Black Christ figure or a Campesino on the cross or a Chinese Holy Family as legitimate forms of the inculturation of the Gospel—while a female Christ child in the manger or woman on the cross appear to many of us as incomprehensible or unacceptable.”¹²¹ The inculturation of a Black Christ or a Campesino Christ are illegitimate forms to represent the biblical Christ, though. Jesus was not Black, or Campesino, nor could he be as the Messiah; he was a first century Palestinian Jewish male, and that is how we must understand him biblically and theologically. So, this argument or question itself is misguided.

Christology must be developed from the canonical narrative of Scripture. Apart from this basic methodological and theological commitment, Christology will take the shape of whatever the “community” desires, including feminine reconstructions. For the purposes of this chapter, however, Greene-McCreight rightly targets the main issue: “the claim about the importance of Jesus’ maleness is a specifically theological claim based on the logic of a narrative reading of the scriptures. While it makes sense to say that Jesus’ maleness is an accident in the technical philosophical sense, the narrative context, such as it is, would not allow a female savior.”¹²²

¹²¹Teresa Berger, “A Female Christ Child in the Manger and a Woman on the Cross, Or: The Historicity of the Jesus Event and the Inculturation of the Gospel,” trans. Mary Deasey Collins, *Feminist Theology* 11 (1996): 33.

¹²²Greene-McCreight, *Feminist Reconstructions*, 109.

Few feminist theologians, as we have seen, want actually to deny the historical fact of Jesus' maleness. But they do want to deny that his being male is related to his Christological-soteriological significance. Greene-McCreight contends, "However, since Jesus was a Jew who fulfilled the promises to Israel and offered up once and for all the perfect sacrifice, he had to be male. If he were not male and a Jew—indeed, a free Jewish male—how could the baptismal promise of Galatians 3:27-29 have been granted?"¹²³

Must Jesus, as the Christ, have been male? If Christian theology desires to place itself under the inspiration and authority of Scripture, then the answer must be yes. The maleness of Jesus must be understood in the context of a "thick text" narrative.¹²⁴ That is, an "intratextual" reading of the reliable narrative of Scripture is necessary for orthodox, evangelical Christology.¹²⁵ The particularities to who Jesus was, and was meant to be, are not irrelevant to the story of Scripture related to the Messiah and his mission.

In support of this claim, Bruce Ware's article, "Could Our Savior Have Been a Woman?", shows the relevance of Jesus' maleness for his incarnational mission, as it

¹²³Ibid. I take it that the baptismal promise mentioned here is the promise that all who are baptized into Christ—free, slave, male, female—are Abraham's children.

¹²⁴C. Stephen Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), chap. 1.

¹²⁵We should say more than Evans, however, and argue that the reliable narrative of Scripture is inspired by God and, thus, inerrant. Arguably, without inerrancy a thick text narrative reading does not make sense. If a thick text narrative reading claims to take the text in its final form, at face value, as word-act revelation, then God's Word is to be interpreted as reliable and trustworthy. In contrast, a "thin" reading implies that the text must be dissected, or external criteria must be applied to find, establish, and determine truth from error. But what is the criteria for finding error, historical-critical methodology? Needless to say, a thick text reading does not need something independent of the text itself to verify its truthfulness, which implies inerrancy as well as the Bible's self-attestation of its inspiration and infallibility.

arises from the reliable narrative of Scripture. Ware offers twelve important reasons “for concluding that the male gender of Jesus was essential both to the reality of his incarnational identity and to the accomplishment of his incarnational mission.”¹²⁶ His twelve reasons are (with scriptural references):

1. Jesus Christ’s pre-incarnate existence and identity is clearly revealed to be that of the eternal Son of the Father.
2. Jesus came as the Second Adam, the Man who stands as Head over his new and redeemed race (Rom 5:12-21 and 1 Cor 15:21-22).
3. The Abrahamic covenant requires that the Savior who would come, as the promised descendant of Abraham, would be a man (Gen 12; 15; 17; genealogies of Matt 1 and Luke 3; Gal 3).
4. The Davidic covenant explicitly requires that the One who will reign forever on the throne of David be a Son of David, and hence a man (2 Sam 7; Eze 34:23-24; 37:24-28; Luke 1:31-33).
5. The new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34 requires that the Savior who comes will actually accomplish the forgiveness of sins it promises, and to do this, the Savior must be a man.¹²⁷
6. The Savior who would come must come as a prophet like unto Moses, as predicted by Moses and fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and so he must be a man (Deut 18:15; Acts 3:22).
7. Our new and permanent High Priest, whose office is secured as sins are atoned for and full pardon is pleaded on our behalf before the Father, must be a man.
8. Christ came also as the glorious King of Kings, reigning over the nations in splendor and righteousness, and to be this King, he must be a man (Isa 9:6-7; Heb 1:8 [reflecting Ps 45:6-7]; Matt 19:28; Rev 19:11-21).

¹²⁶Ware, “Could Our Savior Have Been a Woman?” 33.

¹²⁷Ware connects the promise of the forgiveness of sins in New Covenant to the promise of the Suffering Servant in Isa 53. Here, the one who will make an offering for sin and bear our iniquities is the “man of sorrows” (53:3), thus requiring a male Savior. *Ibid.*, 35. In a personal conversation, Ware also mentioned the sacrificial background of Leviticus as insight into the necessity of Christ’s maleness for the forgiveness of sins promised in the New Covenant. That is, just as the sacrifices for sins on the Day of Atonement were required to be *male* bulls, goats, and lambs (Lev 16; 22:17-33), so also the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world must also be male (Heb 9:11-28).

9. The incarnate mission and ministry of Jesus required that he come as a man.¹²⁸
10. Because the risen Christ is now presented to the Church, not only as her Lord and King, but also as her Bridegroom, the Savior to come must have been a man (Eph 5; Rev 18:23; 19:7; 21:2, 9; 22:17).
11. Because our Savior came as the “Son of God” it is necessary that he come as a man.
12. Because our Savior came as the “Son of Man” it is necessary that he come as a man.¹²⁹

These reasons, reflecting the messianic trajectory of the narrative of Scripture, present a strong case for the necessity of Jesus’ gender as a *male*. Ware’s theological argument seeks to do justice to the full biblical presentation of Jesus the Messiah by emphasizing the preexistence of the eternal Son of the Father;¹³⁰ the embodiment and fulfillment of the offices of prophet, priest, and king; and the eschatological Bridegroom awaiting final consummation. Clearly, each of these emphases grounds the necessity of Christ’s maleness.

¹²⁸Interestingly, egalitarian evangelicals readily agree with Ware on this point (see pp. 181-82 below). Egalitarians contend that the maleness of Jesus was merely God’s accommodation to patriarchal culture. Ware states, “the very ministry Jesus conducted, calling out twelve male disciples, travelling with them over years of itinerate ministry, presenting himself broadly as a teacher of Israel, and challenging the religious leaders of the day, required that he be a man.” *Ibid.*, 36. In contrast to some egalitarians, Ware insists that this is not the *only* reason that necessitates Jesus’ maleness.

¹²⁹David Wells notes that this title has generated an immense and complicated discussion. David F. Wells, *The Person of Christ* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1984), 77. For a survey of the literature in this discussion, see A. J. B. Higgins, *The Son of Man in the Teaching of Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); and I. Howard Marshall, *The Origins of New Testament Christology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1976). See also Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), chap. 6.

¹³⁰For more on the preexistence of the Son of God, see McCready, *He Came Down*; Simon J. Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); and J. Scott Horrell, “The Eternal Son of God in the Social Trinity,” in *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective*, ed. Fred Sanders and Klaus Issler (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007), 44-79.

Like Ware, Peter Jensen argues that “the Christology of the whole Bible must be summoned as an answer to the question, ‘Who is Jesus?’”¹³¹ Jensen continues,

Son of Man, kingdom of God, Christ, new covenant, word of God, Son of God – these and a host of other expressions take their rise from the Old Testament. It is not only the language as such that provides the interpretive categories for assessing the person and work of Jesus, but also the story of what Jesus says and does. His temptations in the desert parallel the experience of Israel; his choice of twelve apostles is a reminder of the twelve tribes; the sufferings of the servant of Isaiah 53 illumine the sufferings of Jesus; his miracles are the expected signs of the presence of God in the eschaton. It is not possible to understand Jesus adequately without setting him firmly in that context.¹³²

The unfolding drama of type and antitype, promise and fulfillment between the Old and New Testaments is the context in which Christology thrives, as Jensen points out. So, the identity of Jesus must bear witness to all that was predicted prophetically of him, all that he said and did, and all that his inspired apostles have revealed about him.¹³³ Ware and Jensen reflect evangelical Christology’s commitment to the primacy and authority of Scripture to provide both the data and framework for Christ’s identity, including the necessity of his male gender.

Conclusion

Feminist arguments against the maleness of Jesus, as well as their Christological reconstructive proposals, have been demonstrated and found unacceptable. While feminists offer certain important critiques (albeit clouded by their worldview) related to traditional Christology, their reactions to certain abuses of biblical doctrine are

¹³¹Peter Jensen, *The Revelation of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 54-55.

¹³²Ibid., 79.

¹³³Ibid., 57.

unwarranted for complete doctrinal revisions of the nature, identity, and mission of Jesus Christ.

In contrast to a hermeneutic of suspicion employed by religious feminists against the patriarchal nature and categories of the Bible, evangelicals adopt a hermeneutic of submission that receives and interacts with the Bible as inspired, divine revelation.¹³⁴ Such an evangelical commitment defends against the feminist prioritization of experience in theological formulation. Particularly with regard to Christology, feminists begin with experience, not Scripture, in order to produce conclusions more inclusive of women's interests. As such, a patriarchal Bible is castigated as an outdated vestige of a male-dominated worldview now incongruent with egalitarian societal achievements.

Evangelicals cannot surrender the storyline of Scripture for Christological formulation in favor of feminist critiques and proposals. Instead, religious feminist proposals must be chastened for their bitter antagonism toward the Bible and its message, and thus, deemed unacceptable for evangelical Christian theology. Conversely, evangelicals need to revisit biblical teachings and adjust some common (but unacceptable) Christian attitudes and practices. Evangelicals must defend, as John Webster claims, that the “norm of Christology is Holy Scripture, the sanctified and inspired instrument through which Christ speaks his gospel to the church and which, as the sufficient and clear attestation of the reality of Christ and as the subject of ever-fresh exegesis, is to direct the church's Christological thought and speech.”¹³⁵

¹³⁴“Hermeneutic of submission” is my own expression.

¹³⁵John Webster, “Prolegomena to Christology: Four Theses,” in *The Person of Christ*, ed. Stephen R. Holmes and Murray A. Rae (New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 33.

McCready's conclusion is fitting: "Rejection or reformulation of the [biblical] doctrine of [Christ] would eviscerate Christianity. The result would be nothing like that which has grown and spread for nearly two thousand years." He adds, "Every distinctive Christian belief would have to be discarded, from the doctrine of God and a realistic picture of human sinfulness to the ethical expectations and promise of divine grace. The modern attempt to make Christianity relevant by removing one of its more challenging teachings would end by making Christianity irrelevant and even destroying it."¹³⁶

Certainly, the necessity of Jesus' maleness and its importance for Christology is one of those "more challenging teachings" that must not be removed to make Christianity more relevant to modern or post-modern cultural sensibilities, regardless of feminist theological criticisms. Instead, Jesus' maleness and the biblical-canonical context in which it derives its necessity must be embraced, valued, and defended for a decidedly evangelical Christology.¹³⁷ Christ's person is not the only aspect of traditional Christology under attack by feminist theologians, however. The work of Christ is also under intense criticism and revision among feminists, and it is to this issue we now turn.

¹³⁶McCready, *He Came Down*, 317. McCready's contention specifically relates to Christ's preexistence, but given Ware's argument, we may also apply this contention to Jesus' maleness.

¹³⁷Unfortunately, some evangelicals are rejecting already the necessity of Christ's maleness. This current trend within evangelicalism will be discussed in chap. 5 of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 4
ASSESSING THE WORK OF CHRIST
IN FEMINIST THEOLOGY

Introduction

The whole question of God finds its ultimate concretion in the problem of suffering. The question rises out of the history of suffering in the world, but finds its privileged moment on the cross: if the Son is innocent and yet put to death, then who or what exactly is God?¹

The traditional doctrine of God is under considerable scrutiny, analysis and revision from many who deem classical representations of God unallowable, whether from process theism, open theism, or liberation theology and its many variations—including feminist theology. In light of the opening quote, one particular aspect of Christian doctrine under assault in contemporary theology, especially from religious feminists, is the relationship between the trinitarian God and the atonement. Specifically, feminists oppugn the notion of traditional atonement theology that God the Father puts his innocent Son to death. As a result, religious feminists contend that traditional atonement theology requires God to be a vicious, cruel, and abusive God who sadistically proffers his only child up to death; indeed, God the Father takes pleasure and satisfaction in killing his only, and innocent, Son. Thus, as Darby Kathleen Ray asserts, “The most important strand in this theological twist is the doctrine of atonement, with its

¹Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1978), 224.

central symbol of the cross. This symbol has become for many feminists a nearly insurmountable stumbling block.”²

In *The Pleasures of God*, John Piper considers Isaiah 53:10 a paradigm for the nature of God in atonement theology: “Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him.” But why should it please God the Father to bruise his Son? Piper answers, “The Son was bruised because God-dishonoring sin could not be ignored. And why couldn’t it be ignored? Why couldn’t God just let bygones be bygones? Because God loves the honor of his name.”³ The question still remains, however, how God could take *pleasure* in putting his son to death. Piper concludes that “God’s pleasure is in what the Son *accomplishes* in dying” and “that the depth of the Son’s suffering was the measure of his love for the Father’s glory.”⁴ Although many evangelicals find Piper’s understanding the most biblical representation of God’s nature in atonement theology, most feminists think any view like his is utterly reprehensible and damaging to women, children, and the oppressed.

Perhaps the most forthright critic of atonement theology from a feminist perspective is Joanne Carlson Brown. Her view is that “Christianity is an abusive theology that glorifies suffering. Is it any wonder that there is so much abuse in modern society when the predominant image or theology of the culture is of ‘divine child abuse’—God the Father demanding and carrying out the suffering and death of his own son? If Christianity is to be liberating for the oppressed, it must itself be liberated from

²Darby Kathleen Ray, *Deceiving the Devil: Atonement, Abuse, and Ransom* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1998), 55.

³John Piper, *The Pleasures of God* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1991), 165.

⁴*Ibid.*, 176, emphasis original.

this theology.”⁵ Feminists criticize any atonement theory or interpretation (like Piper’s mentioned above) that magnifies the obedient death of Jesus the Son to the will of God the Father as nothing more than “divine child abuse.”

This chapter will assess the feminist allegation that the atonement is actually “divine child abuse” and that, consequently, the cross itself grounds the perpetuation and acceptance of domestic abuse and violence. Classical atonement theories will be considered from the perspective of feminist theologians, as well as the theological foundations and practical implications upon which feminists construct their critique of classical atonement theology. Finally, an evangelical response will be offered in consideration of the feminist proposal, briefly addressing the nature of God in classical atonement theories critiqued by feminists, and answering both the theological and practical criticisms of the feminist position.

Feminist Rejection of Traditional Atonement Theology as “Divine Child Abuse”

Does atonement theology demonstrate the nature of God the Father as abusive and violent? Is Jesus merely an abused child who (lovingly?) obeys his father, even to the point of death? Feminists argue that the “message [of Christianity] is complicated by the theology that says Christ suffered in obedience to his Father’s will. This ‘divine child abuse’ is paraded as salvific. The child who suffers ‘without even raising a voice’ is lauded as the hope of the world.”⁶

⁵Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, “For God So Loved the World?” in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse*, ed. Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1989), 26.

⁶Joanne Carlson Brown, “Divine Child Abuse?” *Daughters of Sarah* 18, no. 3 (1992): 24.

The nature of God, as one who wills the suffering and death of his son, is rooted in a patriarchal understanding of society and culture, which is problematic for feminist theologians. Rita Nakashima Brock contends that the social system of patriarchy represented in the Bible actually sanctions child abuse. Theologically, she avers, if patriarchy is accepted as the framework for Christological doctrine, “unquestioned acceptance of benign paternalism as the norm for divine power” grounds child abuse on a cosmic scale.⁷ The feminist disdain for divine paternal prerogative in atonement theology, which allegedly perpetuates abuse and suffering, is amplified through their critique of classical atonement theories.

Feminist Assessment of Classical Atonement Theories

Several classical atonement theories are critiqued by feminists,⁸ the most notable of which are the *Christus Victor* theory, Anselm’s satisfaction theory, and Abelard’s moral influence theory. Of particular contempt to feminist theologians is the penal substitutionary theory.⁹ Penal substitution, however, typically is not considered by

⁷Rita Nakashima Brock, “And A Little Child Will Lead Us: Christology and Child Abuse,” in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse*, ed. Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1989), 42.

⁸For a succinct summary of objections to classical atonement theology from several main feminist theologians, see Margo G. Houts, “Classical Atonement Imagery: Feminist and Evangelical Challenges,” *Catalyst* 19, no. 3 (1993): 1, 5. For a general survey of these atonement theories, see Gregg Allison, “A History of the Doctrine of the Atonement,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 11, no. 2 (2007): 4-19; Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 147-66; and also L. W. Grensted, *A Short History of the Doctrine of the Atonement* (n.p.: Longmans, Green and Co., 1920; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001).

⁹For a concise summary of standard feminist objections to penal substitution, see William C. Placher, “Christ Takes Our Place: Rethinking Atonement,” *Interpretation* 53, no. 1 (1999): 5-20. For representative works on penal substitutionary atonement, see

feminists on its own merit but viewed merely as a Reformation extension and revision of Anselm's satisfaction theory.¹⁰

What do the classical atonement theories demonstrate about the nature of God?

As Craig Nesson posits,

The cross does not make rational sense. Murder never does. And to rationally seek to explain how God calculated Jesus' death, such as occurs when any single atonement theory is taken to its logical conclusions, leads to intractable intellectual difficulties. God is forced to exact Jesus' death either to appease the devil or God's own sense of wounded pride. With reference to the problem of violence, the traditional atonement theories seem to implicate God as perpetrator.¹¹

The classical atonement theories, according to feminist theologians, lead "to intractable intellectual difficulties" (not to mention ethical and moral difficulties) if in fact they are shown to "implicate God as perpetrator" because he calculates and implements the death of Jesus his Son. Carlson Brown notes, "To understand how Christianity is an abusive theology, we must examine the central metaphor of the tradition: the idea of atonement. Classical views of the atonement have in diverse ways asserted that Jesus' suffering and death is fundamental to our salvation."¹²

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1:503-11, 528-34, 652-63; Robert L. Dabney, *Christ Our Penal Substitute* (Richmond, VA: The Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1898); John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986); B. B. Warfield, *Studies in Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1988), 259-97; and J. I. Packer, "What Did the Cross Achieve? The Logic of Penal Substitution," *Tyndale Bulletin* 25 (1974): 3-45.

¹⁰Kenneth D. Jensen, "'Divine Child Abuse': An Evangelical Response to a Popular Feminist Critique of Atonement" (paper presented at the Far West Region annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, La Mirada, CA, 19 April 2002), 2.

¹¹Craig L. Nesson, "Violence and Atonement," *Dialog* 35 (1996): 30.

¹²Carlson Brown, "Divine Child Abuse?" 25.

The *Christus Victor* theory proposed by Gustav Aulén (although rightly considered by feminists to be exemplified in the Greek Fathers) emphasizes the idea of atonement as conflict and victory—Christ fights against the evil powers and victoriously triumphs over them through the cross.¹³ Accordingly, this view “encourages people to endure suffering as a prelude to new life. God works through suffering, pain, and even death to fulfill God’s divine purpose. Suffering is to be looked on as a gift.”¹⁴ Carlson Brown and Parker note, “In this tradition, God is the all-powerful determiner of every event in life, and every event is part of a bigger picture—a plan that will end with triumph.”¹⁵ The problem, for feminist theologians, is when “people say things such as, God has a purpose in the death of the six million Jews, the travesty of this theology is revealed.”¹⁶ Therefore, “By denying the reality of suffering and death, the *Christus Victor* theory of the atonement defames all those who suffer and trivializes reality.”¹⁷ Regardless of Jesus’ triumphant victory over sin and death on the cross, this theory must be rejected according to religious feminist theologians because Jesus’ *suffering* is glorified as salvific, and God’s sadistic character is demonstrated again by purposing triumph through the death of his Son.

¹³Gustav Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement* (London: SPCK, 1931). I consider this a “classical atonement theory” in agreement with Aulén. Bruce Demarest, also views this theory as a subset of the classic or ransom theory. Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 149-51.

¹⁴Carlson Brown, “Divine Child Abuse?” 26.

¹⁵Carlson Brown and Parker, “For God So Loved the World?” 7.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷*Ibid.*

A second atonement theory critiqued by feminists is from Anselm. In his work *Cur Deus Homo?*,¹⁸ Anselm argued that Jesus died to pay the price or bear the punishment for human sin. He died in our place to satisfy God's sense of honor. By Jesus' death, a satisfactory payment or sacrifice is offered to God and his honor is restored. Anselm's theory is particularly difficult for feminists, since they view God's sense of justice in conflict with his love.¹⁹ The notion that God's honor is satisfied through the punishment of his innocent Son is no justice at all and certainly does not substantiate God's love.

Third, Peter Abelard's moral influence theory also merits feminist disapproval.²⁰ In this view, Jesus' death on the cross is a divine demonstration of the love of God: God loves us so much that he is willing to die for us. The emphasis, in contrast to Anselm's insistence upon divine justice, is upon the love and mercy of God. Although grounded in the love of God, Abelard's theory nonetheless glorifies suffering and victimization. Carlson Brown argues that "the moral influence theory is founded on the belief that an innocent, suffering victim—and only an innocent victim for whose suffering we are in some way responsible—has the power to confront us with our guilt and move us to a new decision."²¹ Feminists thus pose the question: if God required the suffering of

¹⁸Anselm, "Why God Became Man," in *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham*, ed. and trans. Eugene R. Fairweather (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956), 100-83.

¹⁹Carlson Brown and Parker, "For God So Loved the World?" 7.

²⁰Peter Abailard, "Exposition to the Epistle to the Romans," in *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham*, ed. Eugene R. Fairweather, trans. Gerald E. Moffatt (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956), 276-87. Note that "Abailard" is a variant of the more commonly cited "Abelard."

²¹*Ibid.*, 27.

his innocent son, will he also require us to suffer abuse and violence—much like Jesus, even though we are innocent? If Jesus' suffering is to influence us with the love of God, then does love necessitate that we suffer unjustly as well?

This brief analysis of the feminist critique of classical atonement theories demonstrates the allegation that God's participation in the crucifixion of Jesus, whether actively or passively, reveals God to be an abusive, sadistic father; and consequently, abuse and victimization are perpetuated if one holds to these classical theological commitments.

Feminist Perspectives for Understanding Atonement

Leanne Van Dyk, responding to the feminist objections to atonement theology as *abusive* theology, remarks,

The range of objections to atonement theology presented by feminist theologians is diverse. But fundamentally, feminists agree that the root of the difficulties arises in the fact of Jesus' death and the doctrine of the atonement which arose to account for that death. The story of the crucifixion and its various theological explanations can too easily imply that Jesus, the Son, died on the cross while His heavenly Father looked on at best with permission and at worst with "satisfaction." This, according to feminist thinkers, reveals a sadistic and patriarchal God.²²

Clearly, feminist thinkers have their own theological commitments regarding atonement as well. If God permitted the suffering and death of his son—or worse, purposed and accomplished it—regardless of the salvific intentions of the cross, then God is a brutal and merciless father. If Jesus is simply an innocent (and obedient) human being, upon whom a despicable, violent, and godless crucifixion was carried out—according to the will of God his father—then salvation cannot flow from the

²²Leanne Van Dyk, "Do Theories of Atonement Foster Abuse?" *Dialog* 35 (1996): 21-22.

injustice of the cross and alternative grounds for salvation must be presented. Thus, feminists question if the atonement demonstrates anything good regarding the nature of God for humanity's salvation.

Feminist theologians spurn the idea that God the Father would determine the death of his innocent son (or hand him over to death) for the sins of the world. In fact, Julie Hopkins sharply contends that "it is morally abhorrent to claim that God the Father demanded the self-sacrifice of his only Son to balance the scales of justice. A god who punishes through pain, despair and violent death is not a god of love but a sadist and a despot."²³ This consideration leads religious feminists to believe that the goodness and love of God are incompatible with his omnipotence and sovereign will. For example, Rosemary Ruether queries, "Where is God [in the death of Jesus Christ]? If Jesus unmask the God who justifies systems of violence, and reveals the true God on the side of the poor, what God reigns in the crucifixion of Jesus and in continued unjust suffering and the killing of the prophets? The God of omnipotent control over history and the God of good news to the poor are incompatible."²⁴ She concludes, "Divine goodness and divine omnipotence cannot be reconciled, as Christianity has sought to do in the theology of atonement."²⁵

What does this mean, other than the fact that the crucifixion of Jesus was *not* according to the will of God, but actually *against* it? For "If God wills Jesus' death, if

²³Julie M. Hopkins, *Towards a Feminist Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 50.

²⁴Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Introducing Redemption in Christian Feminism* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield, 1998), 106.

²⁵*Ibid.*

God wills the unjust violence of poverty, sexism, racism and anti-Semitism, then God is a sadist and a criminal.”²⁶ Elizabeth Johnson concurs, stating that “Jesus’ death was an act of violence brought about by threatened human men, an act of sin and therefore *against the will of a gracious God*.”²⁷ She offers this theological opinion because “feminist theology repudiates an interpretation of the death of Jesus as required by God in repayment for sin” and that such a view is synonymous with “an underlying image of God as an angry, bloodthirsty, violent, and sadistic father, reflecting the very worst kind of male behavior.”²⁸ God’s determination to bruise the Son reveals nothing less than the worst of violent male behavior and the nature of a God who is sadistic and criminal in his dealings with humanity.

Perhaps the insistence of classical atonement imagery of the satisfactory, atoning death of Jesus Christ is the most telling sign of the bloodthirstiness of God. From a feminist perspective, a theological exaltation of death is profoundly problematic. Mary Daly has labeled this theology “necrophilic” because it insists upon the death of Jesus Christ as a necessity for salvation and the procurement of eternal life with God.²⁹ Yet feminists adamantly reject any salvific quality resulting from suffering and death. Rosemary Ruether claims that “a feminist liberation theology of redemption must start with the proposition that unjust suffering and death are never justified as a means of

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Elizabeth A. Johnson, “Redeeming the Name of Christ,” in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 124, emphasis original.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon, 1978), 59.

redemption. We are not redeemed through or because of anyone's unjust torture and death, including that of Jesus."³⁰ Consequently, how do feminist theologians perceive the atonement?

Atonement as God's Suffering Solidarity with Humanity

Perhaps the most common perspective among feminists views the atonement as God's solidarity with suffering humanity. Elizabeth Johnson summarizes this view:

"What comes clear in the event [of the cross], however, is not Jesus' necessary passive victimization divinely decreed as a penalty for sin, but rather a dialectic of disaster and powerful human love through which the gracious God of Jesus enters into solidarity with all those who suffer and are lost. The cross in all its dimensions, violence, suffering, and love is the parable that enacts Sophia-God's participation in the suffering of the world."³¹

In this perspective, some feminists contend that atonement has nothing to do with absolving the sins of the world but is rather a demonstration of the concordant suffering of God and man. Carter Heyward, a post-Christian feminist theologian, affirms atonement in terms of solidarity. She says, "We need to say *no* to a tradition of violent punishment and to a God who would crucify us—much less an innocent brother in our place—rather than hang with us, struggle with us, wait with us, and grieve with us—forever and eternally if need be."³² She continues to argue that atonement occurs whenever God is "incarnate in any context of violence," and that the image of Jesus

³⁰Ruether, *Introducing Redemption*, 101.

³¹Johnson, "Redeeming the Name of Christ," 124-25.

³²Carter Heyward, *Saving Jesus from Those Who Are Right: Rethinking What It Means to Be Christian* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 175, emphasis original.

shedding his blood is not the result of “a deity who, in the image of a father, would hand his son over to be crucified,” but rather the image of Jesus’ love and solidarity with us in our suffering.³³

Atonement and the Marks of Sexual Difference

As a minority perspective, represented by French feminist philosopher and cultural theorist Luce Irigaray,³⁴ the atonement is described in terms of Christ’s revealing in his body the marks of sexual difference. Much of Irigaray’s work centers on the question of sexual difference and gender distinctives, particularly in terms of opposing “phallogocentrism,” or the primacy of the male as the starting point or universal referent in language, society, etc.³⁵ The issue of gender and biological distinction is relevant for Christology, as evident in the discussion of Christ’s person in chapter 3 of this dissertation. Thus, Irigaray’s discussion of Christ’s sexuality has direct and pertinent consequence for atonement theology.

³³Ibid., 121-22.

³⁴For a helpful biographical introduction to Irigaray, see Sarah K. Donovan, “Luce Irigaray (1932-present),” *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [on-line]; accessed 3 July 2008; available from <http://www.iep.utm.edu/i/irigaray.htm>; Internet. A few of Irigaray’s major works are Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); idem, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); and idem, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993). See also Margaret Whitford, ed., *The Irigaray Reader* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991).

³⁵Irigaray’s understanding and development of this concept is tied to her reading (and critical rejection of) the writings and concepts of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. She is also indebted to Jacques Derrida’s deconstructionism and linguistic analysis, especially as it relates to “logocentrism.”

Unlike many feminist theologians, Irigaray does not perceive Jesus' maleness as necessarily problematic. While Jesus does not represent women through his maleness per se, through the events of the cross Jesus' body becomes more inclusive of the feminine. Irigaray states, "In the body of the Son of Man there appears, in the form of a wound, the place that, in women, is naturally open."³⁶

Irigaray contends that the phallus and the two lips of the vagina are emblematic, not biological, so that the Christ might be inclusive of both sexes in the cross—and not just a man dying in vicarious representation of men only. Further, the cross becomes a bridge linking the once purely androcentric symbol for the atonement with gynocratic and matriarchal traditions.³⁷ Perhaps Irigaray is co-opting contributions from medieval Catholicism that perceive the wound in Christ's side as a vaginal opening, a place where the water breaks and blood flows in order to give birth to the Church.³⁸ Whatever her influence, Irigaray's insights for feminist Christology insists that Jesus' gender and sexuality need not be evaded or rejected, especially in terms of atonement, if the cross is considered to be inclusive of the feminine. In fact, she argues, the spiritual understanding of sexual difference apparent in the body of Christ on the cross "could be our 'salvation' if we thought it through."³⁹

³⁶Luce Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 166.

³⁷Graham Ward, *Christ and Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 140.

³⁸Note the work of Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982). See also chap. 3 n. 57 above for additional sources related to this issue.

³⁹Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 5.

Moreover, the cross for Irigaray should be envisioned as a profoundly feminine symbol. That is, the cross more adequately displays the representation of female genitalia than it does the male. She notes that the “mouth lips and the genital lips do not point in the same direction,” but rather “cross over each other like the arms of the cross.”⁴⁰ Jesus’ male biological form becomes ambivalent when hanging on the feminine form of the cross. Therefore, for some feminists the cross is inclusive of women, not oblivious to their gender or sexuality with respect to atonement.

Atonement Itself Questioned and Rejected

Finally, a third feminist perspective not only calls atonement itself into question but further insists that it must be abolished from theology altogether. Carlson Brown plainly asserts, “We must do away with the atonement, this idea of a blood sin upon the whole human race which can be washed away only by the blood of the lamb. This blood-thirsty God is the God of patriarchy who at the moment controls the whole Christian tradition. We do not need to be saved by Jesus’ death from some original sin. We need to be liberated from this abusive patriarchy.”⁴¹

Womanist theologian Dolores Williams concurs. She avers, “I don’t think we need a theory of atonement at all. Atonement has to do so much with death. I don’t think

⁴⁰Ibid., 18.

⁴¹Carlson Brown, “Divine Child Abuse?” 28. From this conjecture, Carlson Brown goes on to argue for Christianity devoid of atonement. Christianity is no longer about redemption from sin through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, but rather about justice and liberation from oppressive social structures. She also states, “Jesus was not an acceptable sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, because God demands not sacrifice but justice. No one was saved by the death of Jesus.” Ibid.

we need folks hanging on crosses and blood dripping and weird stuff.”⁴² Thus, since the atonement itself appears necrophilic and demonstrates the unjust torture of Jesus according to the will of God the Father, some feminists argue that it must be categorically rejected.

The Practical Implication of Classical Atonement Theology: The Acceptance and Perpetuation of Abuse and Violence

The potential moral consequences of holding a traditional view of the atonement confirm exactly what feminists despise regarding atonement theology. J. Denny Weaver notes, “Since satisfaction atonement holds up an image of divine submission, an authoritarian family structure that emphasizes passive submission and obedience to men makes a young woman ‘vulnerable to sexual abuse from her father and male relatives.’”⁴³ For feminists, one of the unfortunate (and logical) consequences of classical atonement theories is the impetus they provide for violence and abuse, whether physical, emotional, verbal, or sexual. Carlson Brown contends this point, saying,

When parents image God as righteously demanding the total obedience of his son, even obedience to death, what will prevent the parent from engaging in divinely sanctioned child abuse? As long as our culture images God as a father demanding

⁴²Dolores Williams, quoted by Dottie Chase, “United Methodist Women Get Taste of Sophia Worship,” *Good News* 27, no. 4 (1994): 36-38. “Womanist” refers to the designation for the stream of thought arising from black feminists. For a representative womanist perspective among feminist Christologies, see Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women’s Christ and Black Women’s Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1989).

⁴³J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 134, from his discussion of feminist theologian Julie Hopkins’ critique of atonement theology.

and carrying out the suffering and death of his own son, it is sanctioning abuse and it is abandoning the victims of abuse and oppression.⁴⁴

Feminists consistently argue that classical theological positions on atonement actually enable and perpetuate violence and abuse. If we value a God who would deliver up his own Son to death and inflict intense suffering and violence upon him in order that his character (justice, holiness) might be upheld and his righteous demands satisfied, then according to feminists there is no reason why we should oppose or prohibit the unjust abuse and violence toward women, children, and the oppressed. In fact, if Christian theology insists that we be disciples of Jesus Christ, then to identify with Jesus means to accept suffering and violent abuse. J. Denny Weaver comments,

Beyond accommodation of violence, the atonement images themselves provide a model of divinely sanctioned violence and of passive submission to that violence. For people, particularly women, who live in abusive and oppressive environments, [feminists] believe, identifying with the Jesus pictured in [the classical theories of the atonement] can underscore and sustain their victimization and their sense that the Christian calling is to endure the abuse and oppression.⁴⁵

Carlson Brown also strongly affirms this assertion: “But to sanction the suffering and death of Jesus, even while calling it unjust, so that God can be active in the world, only serves to perpetuate the acceptance of the very suffering against which one is struggling. The glorification of anyone’s suffering allows the glorification of all suffering.”⁴⁶

Perhaps Carlson Brown speaks on behalf of all feminists when she asserts, “I believe Christianity has been a—sometimes *the*—primary force in shaping our acceptance of abuse. The image of Christ on the cross as savior of the world communicates the

⁴⁴Carlson Brown, “Divine Child Abuse?” 26.

⁴⁵Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, 130.

⁴⁶Carlson Brown, “Divine Child Abuse?” 28.

message that suffering is redemptive.”⁴⁷ As a result, “The disciple’s role is to suffer in the place of others, as Jesus suffered for us all. But this glorification of suffering as salvific, held before us daily in the image of Jesus hanging from the cross, encourages women who are being abused to be more concerned about their victimizer than about themselves.”⁴⁸ Indeed, it is the “image of God the father demanding and carrying out the suffering and death of his own son [which] has sustained a culture of abuse and led to the abandonment of victims of abuse and oppression.”⁴⁹

Feminists argue that the cross of Jesus Christ is an act of child abuse on a cosmic scale. If God the Father actually willed that his Son Jesus should give his life up on the cross, then he is nothing more than a sadist and a tyrant. Feminist analysis of classical atonement theories confirm their insistence on this point; yet, they press their case even further. Not only does the image of God appear as despicable as it does in these theories, but the theological commitments of these theories actually empower and propagate violence and abuse.

Are these assertions sufficiently viable and true to lead to abandonment of the atonement altogether, as some feminists claim? Or should traditional atonement theology be revised in such a way to relegate it in favor of a more palatable (i.e., less necrophilic) and sensitive theory? The following section will examine the classical atonement theories from an evangelical perspective and offer a response to the assertions and questions posed by feminists in relation to the nature of God in atonement theology.

⁴⁷Ibid., 24.

⁴⁸Carlson Brown and Parker, “For God So Loved the World?” 8.

⁴⁹Ibid., 9.

Answering the Feminist Critique of Atonement Theology

Margo Houts, in a critical article in response to feminist claims about the abusive nature of the atonement, argues that feminists sound timely warnings that the glorification of suffering may in fact encourage women to embrace abuse and victimization. It is the nonbiblical distortions and theoretical accretions related to the atonement, however, that have been used to encourage abuse; but the atonement itself is not inherently abusive. She argues “what [feminists fail] to acknowledge is that the allegation of sadism comes into view only when Jesus is severed from the Godhead and made an object of divine action against him.”⁵⁰

If Houts’ claim holds, then the atonement theories, and the nature of God revealed in them, will repel the allegations of sadism. This is particularly the case if the relationship of the Father and the Son are properly considered biblically and theologically. Thus, answers to feminist theological and practical charges against the atonement are found through a biblically informed trinitarian formulation and a right understanding of the God-world relationship. Although the doctrine of God is central to feminist critiques of traditional atonement theology, their views regarding soteriology and Christology will also be considered and addressed.

The Nature of God in Atonement Theories

Leanne Van Dyk, like Houts, also reacting to feminist claims about the atonement, contends that the “terrible paradox of the Christian faith is that [salvation]

⁵⁰Margo G. Houts, “Atonement and Abuse: An Alternative View,” *Daughters of Sarah* 18, no. 3 (1992): 31.

happened because of a death—a notorious public execution. This is the dark mystery of the atonement. No theory of the atonement can effectively account for that central paradox. Rather, the range of atonement theories attempt to focus our attention, illuminate the truth and point beyond themselves to God.”⁵¹

Properly understood, then, how do the atonement theories “illuminate the truth and point beyond themselves to God”? Considered on their own merit, the atonement theories reveal the complex nature of God in the atonement.⁵² In the cross of Jesus Christ there is a mixture of divine justice and mercy, love and wrath. First, the *Christus Victor* motif demonstrates “the foundational truth that God in Christ triumphed over the law, sin, death, and the Devil. In a great cosmic drama, that resulted in his demise, Christ overcame hostile spiritual powers. As a consequence of that victory, captive sinners were freed and given eternal life.”⁵³ This motif is confirmed by Scripture as the apostle John argues, “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). The writer of Hebrews conclusively affirms this purpose of conquest in Christ as well: “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself [Jesus] partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear were subject to lifelong

⁵¹Van Dyk, “Do Theories of Atonement Foster Abuse?” 25.

⁵²See Stephen J. Wellum, “The Nature of the Atonement: Various Metaphors” (classroom lecture notes, 27050—*Advanced Introduction to Christian Theology*, Spring 2001, photocopy), 161-69.

⁵³Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 151. For a contemporary defense of the *Christus Victor* motif, see Gregory A. Boyd, “*Christus Victor* View,” in *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views*, ed. James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 23-49. Boyd’s view is expanded in his larger work on the “warfare motif” of Scripture in idem, *God At War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997).

slavery” (Heb 2:14-15). Paul also highlights the triumphant victory of Christ over the powers: “He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them” in the cross (Col 2:15).

Nevertheless, the feminist belief is that victimization never leads to triumph, but only the destruction of human worth and dignity.⁵⁴ Implicit in the allegation that the cross is “divine child abuse” is the assumption that Jesus is an unwilling participant in and victim of the Father’s despotic authority. Thus, feminists wrongly interpret the *Christus Victor* motif as magnifying the triumph of the Father’s purposes to the neglect of the Son’s personal dignity and value—in which Christ unwittingly becomes a helpless means to a cruel end. In opposition to this assumption, Paul declares that the Son (who shares equality with the Father), “made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:7-8). For this end Jesus came, in order to triumph over sin and death for us and for our salvation—and to think otherwise is a satanic perversion (Matt 16:21-23).

Second, Anselm’s satisfaction theory has numerous strengths as an atonement theory,⁵⁵ particularly its emphasis of God’s character in light of human sin. John Stott comments, “The greatest merits of Anselm’s exposition are that he perceived clearly the

⁵⁴Carlson Brown, “Divine Child Abuse?” 26.

⁵⁵See Stephen J. Wellum, “The Satisfaction Theory” (classroom lecture notes, 27050—*Advanced Introduction to Christian Theology*, Spring 2001, photocopy), 172. Wellum notes that Anselm treats the biblical data well and also “integrates the incarnation and atonement well, and roots the necessity of the atonement back to the nature of God.” However, according to Wellum, Anselm makes too much of the honor issue (probably reflecting Anselm’s own feudal system context), and does not properly mention the love of God.

extreme gravity of sin (as wilful [*sic*] rebellion against God in which the creature affronts the majesty of his Creator), the unchanging holiness of God (as unable to condone any violation of his honour), and the unique perfections of Christ (as the God-man who voluntarily gave himself up to death for us).⁵⁶ One can easily explain why religious and radical feminists reject such a theory as this when their theological systems make no mention of individual sin (except patriarchal abuses) and the holiness and righteousness of God (and the dynamic between them). Perhaps, according to Thelma Megill-Cobbler, “What is being rejected by these feminists is the idea that the death of Jesus fulfills the requirements of God’s justice in order that sin be forgiven.”⁵⁷

Third, Peter Abelard offered an atonement theory in stark contrast to that of Anselm. In a critique eerily anticipating feminist objections, Abelard stated: “How cruel and wicked it seems that anyone should demand the blood of an innocent person as the price for anything, or that it should in any way please him that an innocent man should be slain—still less that God should consider the death of his Son so agreeable that by it he should be reconciled to the world!”⁵⁸ Yet he continues, “To us it seems that we are justified nonetheless in the blood of Christ and reconciled to God in this: that by his extraordinary grace exhibited to us, in that his son assumed our nature, and by teaching us by word and example, persevered until death, he draws us closer to himself through love.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 119.

⁵⁷Thelma Megill-Cobbler, “A Feminist Rethinking of Punishment Imagery in Atonement,” *Dialog* 35 (1996): 16.

⁵⁸Abailard, “Exposition to the Epistle to the Romans,” 282-83.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 282.

In the Abelardian view, atonement is brought about by love, the love of God embodied in Jesus Christ. Bruce Demarest concludes, “In sum, people are saved by the power of divine love that compellingly elicits human love.”⁶⁰ While Abelard’s insistence upon the love of God as the foundation for atonement is noteworthy, as an atonement theory it leaves out a significant portion of biblical data and critical aspects of the atonement acknowledged by Anselm and others (above). Notwithstanding, feminists rebuff this theory as well on the grounds that it still glorifies suffering. Moreover, it maintains that if Jesus is influencing us (albeit through love), he is influencing us to embrace suffering, violence and victimization.

Finally, closely related to Anselm’s theory is the penal substitutionary theory of the atonement, also rejected by feminist theologians. Darby Kathleen Ray notes, “By the time of John Calvin in the early sixteenth century, the attention paid to God’s honor [in Anselm] was replaced by a focus on the wrath of God; concomitantly, the death of Christ was interpreted not in terms of satisfaction but as punishment for sin. According to Calvin, human sin is a dreadful curse that inevitably and rightfully incites the wrath of God because we have broken God’s law and stand condemned to eternal death.”⁶¹ The death of Jesus as satisfaction of God’s honor is despicable in the minds of feminists, indeed. But to claim that Jesus died as a punishment for (other people’s) sin and to bear the wrath of God is particularly anathema.

Perhaps the most common biblical text that supports these views (satisfaction and penal substitution) is found in Romans 3:21-26:

⁶⁰Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 153.

⁶¹Ray, *Deceiving the Devil*, 11.

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in *Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus* (emphasis mine).⁶²

In Jesus Christ, whom “God put forth as a propitiation,” God’s justice was satisfied and his holy anger (wrath) was averted. This atonement was necessary in order that his righteousness might be clearly revealed against sin, so that he might be the “just and the justifier.” Still, Calvin claims that “in order to interpose between us and God’s anger, and satisfy his righteous judgment, it was necessary that he [Christ] should feel the weight of divine vengeance,” and so “the Son of God endured the pains produced by the curse and wrath of God, the source of death.”⁶³ Although divine attributes such as justice, righteousness, and wrath are critical to this discussion, further elaboration will be delayed until the section of “Theology Proper” in “Answering Feminist Theology” below. Suffice it to say that contrary to feminist objections to these attributes, atonement theories such as Anselm’s and penal substitution both better represent the biblical data concerning the nature of God in atonement as well as properly magnify him (not malign him) for his status and prerogative as Creator and Savior of the world (Rom 9:14-24).

⁶²See exposition, see D. A. Carson, “Atonement in Romans 3:21-26,” in *The Glory of the Atonement*, ed. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 119-39; Steve Jeffrey, Mike Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity, 2007), 77-88; Rohintan K. Mody, “Penal Substitutionary Atonement in Paul: An Exegetical Study of Romans 3:25-26,” in *The Atonement Debate*, ed. Derek Tidball, David Hilborn, and Justin Hacker (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 115-35; and Jarvis J. Williams, “Penal Substitution in Romans 3:25-26?,” *The Princeton Theological Review* 13, no. 2 (2007): 73-81.

⁶³Ray, *Deceiving the Devil*, 11, representing Calvin.

Addressing Feminist Soteriology, Christology, and Theology Proper

The concern of this chapter is to assess the feminist understanding of the work of Christ as “divine child abuse.” Much of the feminist assault against traditional atonement theology centers upon the doctrine of God. In their view demonstrated above, any atonement theory that centers upon the death of Jesus Christ, carried out in accordance with the will of the Father, presents a picture of God as abusive, violent, sadistic, and cruel. While theology proper is central to feminist theological concerns, feminist views of soteriology and Christology also must be addressed briefly to illuminate their incomplete and illegitimate concept of God in the saving work of Jesus Christ.

Soteriology. Because most feminists are willing to conceive of Christianity devoid of any atonement whatsoever⁶⁴ or at least hold a severely truncated view of the biblical data, salvation must be redefined to accommodate their perspective. This approach to salvation is troublesome but even more reveals a fundamentally mistaken assumption on the part of feminist theologians. Van Dyk laments,

This approach, it seems to me, invites a disinterested subjective judgment on an event, the cross, which is the constitutive and defining event of the Christian faith. The efficacy and salvific worth of Christ’s death does not depend on our interpretation. Rather, the soteriological significance of Christ’s death is an integral part of a Christian identity. The theological task of articulating and interpreting Christ’s death is secondary to a primary affirmation of this central Christian claim.⁶⁵

The problem, as Van Dyk shows, is that feminists are content with (re)defining salvation but miss the entire point of the death of Christ from biblical theology and the unfolding

⁶⁴Carlson Brown, “Divine Child Abuse?” 28.

⁶⁵Van Dyk, “Do Theories of Atonement Foster Abuse?” 25.

drama of the narrative of Scripture. Without a systematic concept of sin, judgment, and justification, feminists are well outside the boundaries of orthodox Christianity. In feminist theology, there is no need for salvation properly understood; that is, Jesus' death accomplishes nothing efficacious.

Like the majority of feminists, Rita Nakashima Brock rejects all soteriologies that would glorify death or make Jesus' death salvific. Any understanding of Jesus' death that is "asserted to be the ultimate sign of self-sacrifice and divine self-giving, and a symbol of the willingness of true believers to sacrifice themselves out of devotion to higher authority or will," as well as any understanding of Jesus dying in our stead, should be refused completely.⁶⁶ Jesus should not be viewed as our substitute because he himself was the innocent victim of unjust suffering and death at the hands of wicked men.

Still, a feasible definition of salvation is offered by feminist theologians. As a variant of liberation theology, feminists typically view salvation as God's solidarity with human beings in their suffering to overcome oppression. J. Denny Weaver elucidates this point well, "In [feminist] interpretation, the suffering and death of Jesus show that God clearly identifies with and understands the plight of oppressed and suffering people. God was present in the death of Jesus, not because suffering was necessary but because God chose to be in solidarity with suffering humanity."⁶⁷ In addition, some Roman Catholic feminists also apply this salvific suffering solidarity to Jesus' mother Mary as

⁶⁶Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 90-93.

⁶⁷Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, 135. This theme is clear also in Hopkins, *Towards a Feminist Christology*, 50-63; Heyward, *Saving Jesus from Those Who Are Right*, 121-22; and Johnson, "Redeeming the Name," 115-37.

coredemptrix,⁶⁸ who suffers specifically in the place of women as God's representative. The point is, feminists do not conceive of salvation in traditional, orthodox terms but seek alternatives that better coexist with feminist ideology and reconstructions of Christian doctrine.

In contrast to feminist soteriology, evangelical theology insists that the suffering and death of Jesus Christ is essential for salvation, as delineated in the Christian gospel revealed in Scripture. The Old Testament identifies our redemption in terms of the woman's seed whose heel is bruised in conflict with the serpent (Gen 3:15), anticipated in Abraham's almost-sacrifice of his son Isaac (Gen 22), foreshadowed in the bloody sacrificial system of Leviticus, and prophetically described in Isaiah's suffering servant (Isa 52-55).

Building upon and fulfilling Old Testament salvific revelation, the New Testament grounds salvation upon the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. The Gospels each culminate with the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus (Matt 26-28; Mark 15-16; Luke 23-24; John 19-20). The apostolic preaching of the early church centered on the death of Jesus for our salvation (Acts 2:23-24), claiming that Christ has purchased us with his blood (Acts 20:28; cf. Rev 5:9) and that his death for our sins is intrinsic to the gospel itself (1 Cor 15:1ff.). The writer of Hebrews admits that apart from the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins (Heb 9:22), and that compared with the sacrifices of bulls and goats, Jesus' sacrifice and blood is far superior (Heb 9-10). In addition, Jesus is

⁶⁸Mary Aquin O'Neill, "The Mystery of Being Human Together," in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 151-52. Interestingly, this book does not contain a chapter on salvation, even though the work is an attempt to reconstruct the "essentials" of theology according to feminist ideology.

“crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death” (Heb 2:9), because it was through his own death that he defeated the one who holds the power of death (Heb 2:14-15). Without a doubt, Paul’s contribution to the New Testament also magnifies the bloody cross of Jesus Christ. For Paul, atonement is impossible apart from Christ’s death on the cross; therefore, he make this theme the centerpiece of his message.⁶⁹ Paul declares that Christ’s blood is the propitiation for our sins (Rom 3:25) and that by his blood we have been justified (Rom 5:9), redeemed (Eph 1:7), and reconciled to God (Col 1:20-21). Therefore, Paul concludes, we should boast in the cross of Christ (Gal 6:14).

In conclusion, apart from the redemptive suffering of Jesus Christ and his subsequent death on the cross, we have no salvation or atonement for sins. Feminist theologians who reject atonement or depart from the biblical teaching of the cross in favor of existential concerns lose the only gospel that saves and purvey a false and empty means for salvation (Gal 1:9-12).

Christology. The person of Christ according to feminist theology, also under assault and revision, was elucidated above in chapter 3. Nonetheless, pressing on to a trinitarian answer to the feminist critique of atonement theology, I must briefly address feminist Christology as it relates specifically to the atonement. John Stott rightly observed, “At the root of every caricature of the cross there lies a distorted Christology.

⁶⁹See Richard Gaffin, “Atonement in the Pauline Corpus,” in *The Glory of the Atonement*, ed. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 140-62. Compare also George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 423-56; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), chap. 8; and idem, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), chap. 11.

The person and work of Christ belong together.”⁷⁰ Nonetheless, to achieve the purpose of thorough evaluation, this dissertation has considered Christ’s person and work separately in order to understand specific feminist arguments and prescriptions.

A cardinal belief of many religious feminist theologians is that Jesus was not God. Most feminist theologians reject Chalcedonian Christology in some form, if not *in toto*.⁷¹ Julie Hopkins states it this way: “I maintain that it is possible to believe that God was reconciling believers to God’s self upon the cross without claiming the [*sic*] Jesus was uniquely divine or that a blood price was paid” because “God was present in the mode of suffering at Calvary.”⁷² Thus, the act of Jesus’ unjust suffering and death itself brings us to God, since God was present in the suffering and death of Christ as he overcame injustice and oppression.

While a full defense of orthodox (Chalcedonian) Christology will not be provided here, we cannot rightly understand atonement theology unless Jesus Christ is fully divine. John Frame helps us here, saying, “The most fundamental biblical datum, in my view, is the way in which Jesus stands in the place of Yahweh as the Lord of the covenant.”⁷³ Frame argues that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully human, and this is the

⁷⁰Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 160.

⁷¹For example, Hopkins, *Towards a Feminist Christology*; and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam’s Child, Sophia’s Prophet* (New York: Continuum, 1994).

⁷²Hopkins, *Towards a Feminist Christology*, 58.

⁷³John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 650. Frame argues that covenant lordship is a—if not *the*—central theme of the Bible, since it “provides a key for us to understand how the other themes fit into the overall biblical story” and by emphasizing “the lordship of God (and particularly of Christ)” our attention will be focused “on the main biblical message of salvation without ignoring or denying the large amount of biblical teaching on the nature and acts of God.” *Ibid.*, 12.

reason why atonement can be made only through him. He appeals to John 5:18-23 to defend “the eternal fellowship between the Father and the Son: their mutual knowledge, mutual love, and mutual glorification” and that the unique sonship of Jesus implies his ontological deity:⁷⁴

This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, *but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.* So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.” (John 5:18-23, emphasis mine)

Because the Father and the Son are equal in essence (“making himself equal with God”; cf. Phil 2:5-11) and also in purpose (“whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise”), Jesus went willingly to the cross.⁷⁵ The cross event, then, is the Son’s purposeful, willing and voluntary offering of himself to ransom “people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev 5:9). Jesus said in John 10:18, “No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.” As Paul adds, “I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and *gave himself* for me” (Gal 2:20, emphasis mine).

⁷⁴Ibid., 659-60.

⁷⁵For an excellent and succinct treatment of this assertion, see Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), chap. 4.

Darby Kathleen Ray notes, “One of the most offensive components of classical theologies of the cross from the standpoint of those concerned about the relationship between theological violence and ‘real’ violence is the notion that Jesus endured his suffering and death willingly; that is, the idea that what is redemptive about Jesus’ life is his *freely chosen* obedience and self-sacrificial love.”⁷⁶ Again, unless there is a firm belief in the deity of Jesus Christ, who does all things in conjunction with the Father for their mutual glorification, religious feminists will continue in *angst* over the willing self-sacrifice of Jesus (who is merely a human) on the cross.

Similarly, Reta Halteman Finger states, “Besides violating Jesus’ deity and the trinitarian unity of God, [the term ‘divine child abuse’] also violates Jesus’ humanity. At his death Jesus was not a child without power and without choice. He was an adult who made choices and understood their implications.”⁷⁷ Jesus did not go to the cross because he was a foolishly obedient child. No; he knew the full consequences of the cross and the beneficial result it would bring for the salvation of the world. Therefore, once the erroneous and distorted christology is corrected, in tandem with a proper view of God the Father, feminist allegations of “divine child abuse” fail.

Theology proper. Thelma Megill-Cobbler comments, “The chief theological concern raised in recent feminist critiques of atonement doctrine has to do with the image of God. Specifically, the image of God in a penal substitution atonement theory is that of

⁷⁶Ray, *Deceiving the Devil*, 58, emphasis original.

⁷⁷Reta Halteman Finger, “Liberation or Abuse?” *Daughters of Sarah* 18, no. 3 (1992): 38.

a God of retribution who punishes the innocent son.”⁷⁸ The notions of punishment and retribution related to the purpose of the cross are the stimulus from which feminists promote their position of “divine child abuse” with respect to atonement theology.

Should justice include punishment? What is the nature of the punishment that Christ endured on the cross? Is it the pouring out of God’s wrath upon Christ in retribution for the sins of the world? Does the wrath of God have any place in atonement theology? From these questions we will survey the divine attributes of justice, righteousness, and wrath in conjunction with the atonement.

First, the very rationale for the atonement is linked to the righteousness or justice of God.⁷⁹ Righteousness means that God requires moral conformity from his creatures and justice means that God deals with humans according to their adherence to or lack of conformity to his laws.⁸⁰ John Frame adds, “The main idea of *divine* righteousness is that God acts according to a perfect internal standard of right and wrong. All his actions are within the limits (if we can use that term reverently) of that standard.”⁸¹ Atonement, then, is grounded in the righteous character of God, whose standard of righteousness and justice is absolutely perfect.

⁷⁸Megill-Cobbler, “A Feminist Rethinking,” 16.

⁷⁹I am indebted to Stephen Wellum for this point. This assertion is also defended in Thomas R. Schreiner, “Penal Substitution View,” in *The Nature of the Atonement*, ed. James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 67-98; and Herman Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, vol. 3 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006).

⁸⁰See John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 345ff.; and Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, chap. 21.

⁸¹Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 446.

In contrast, feminists imply that God is unjust and commits flagrant unrighteousness when he sends his innocent Son to die on the cross. Yet “Paul defended his conviction of the righteous judgment of God when he rhetorically asked, ‘if our *unrighteousness* brings out God’s righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is *unjust* in bringing his wrath on us?’ (Rom 3:5, cf. 9:14). Certainly, God is a righteous judge and is just in all of his dealings toward men (Rom 3:5, Heb 6:10).”⁸² The reality of the totality of human sin against the righteous standards of God could not go unpunished. Therefore, Christ has become righteousness for us (1 Cor 1:30), on the account that “For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21).

But doesn’t this text reveal the *injustice* leveled by religious feminists against classical atonement theories, that God would sacrifice his own innocent Son on behalf of others? No, because from here we must remember Romans 3:21-26, one of the main texts that support the satisfaction and penal substitution theories of the atonement. Paul’s argument is that God has revealed his righteousness in Jesus Christ, apart from the law yet confirmed by it. And it is in Jesus Christ that redemption is offered, because God put him forward as a propitiation⁸³ (appeasement of wrath) for our sins. Why did God do

⁸²See the articles for “Unjust [ἄδικος]” and “Unrighteousness [ἀδικία],” in *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, ed. William D. Mounce (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006): 759-60. These articles are my original contributions to Mounce’s dictionary.

⁸³Note the discussion of ἰλαστήριον in Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 178-99. Schreiner notes, “The presence of propitiation does not exclude the concept of expiation. Both are present in [Romans] 3:25. The death of Jesus removed sin [expiation] and satisfied God’s holy anger [propitiation].” *Ibid.*, 192.

this? Paul answers by stating this was to show *God's righteousness*, in order that he might be *just*, and the justifier of those who have faith in Jesus.

Theologians have often recognized justice as the multifaceted expression of God's righteous and holy nature in response to human action. John Feinberg describes justice under the broad categories of *rectoral* (the institution of moral governance) and *distributive* (accountability to the moral laws established by God) justice,⁸⁴ although distributive justice is further parsed as *remunerative* (reward) and *retributive* (punishment) justice. Herman Bavinck notes that remunerative justice is the most common expression of justice in the Scriptures, but the idea of retribution is most certainly present as well.⁸⁵ That is, the Lord will by no means clear the guilty (Nah 1:3; Exod 20:7), but in his righteousness he will punish the wicked (Neh 9:32-36; Pss 7:12-13; 9:5-8; Dan 9:14-15; Rom 2:5; 2 Thess 1:5-10). But how can God be *just* to place upon Jesus the punishment that rightly belongs to others? Herein lies the mystery of grace and mercy toward us in the atonement of Jesus Christ. Although we may not fully understand the dynamic of Jesus' innocent self-sacrifice assuaging the deserved punishment and wrath of God upon sinners, we must certainly ask rhetorically as Bildad did, "Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert the right?" (Job 8:3). Certainly not! And we agree with Moses, when he declared: "The Rock! His work is perfect, for all his ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and

⁸⁴Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 346-48. Feinberg also mentions *egalitarian* justice, where everyone receives the same response regardless of their actions, but he admits that Scripture does not suggest that God operates within this distinction.

⁸⁵Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, trans. William Hendriksen (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1977; reprint, 2003), 215-23. Bavinck's terminology is different than Feinberg's, but the distinctions of categories are basically the same.

upright is He” (Deut 32:4, NASB). Truly, God’s justice and righteousness are exemplified in the wrath-bearing sacrifice of Jesus for our sins (Rom 3:21-26), in which God demonstrates his great love for us (Rom 5:8-11).

As for the wrath of God in atonement theology, Stephen Wellum posits:

Closely related to God’s holiness is his wrath, i.e. his holy reaction to evil. Scripture speaks of the wrath of God in high-intensity language. And it is important to note that a substantial part of the Bible’s story line turns on God’s wrath. No doubt, God is forbearing [*sic*], gracious, and longsuffering, but he is also a God of holiness, wrath, and judgment. The *wrath* of God, unlike the love or holiness of God, is *not* one of the *intrinsic* perfections of God. Rather it is a function of God’s holiness against sin.⁸⁶

Although feminist theologians would argue that this notion of the wrath of God perpetuates a violent and sadistic picture of God, it is, nonetheless, the biblical picture of God’s nature in response to human sin. Again, because sin, holiness and judgment are noticeably absent from religious feminists, any concept that affirms divine wrath against sin is rejected outright. The wrath of God against human sin is primarily eschatological, but in some sense it is already being realized within human history.⁸⁷ That is, we in our human nature apart from God’s redemption are categorized as “children of wrath” (Eph 2:3). Some have described this present wrath upon humanity as God’s abandonment of sinners to the consequences of their sin (cf. Rom 1:18-3:20), but Scripture seems to

⁸⁶Stephen J. Wellum, “Divine Judgment” (classroom lecture notes, 27050—*Advanced Introduction to Christian Theology*, Spring 2001, photocopy), 132. See also Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 463-68; Gary A. Herion, “Wrath of God (OT),” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 6, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 989-96; Stephen Travis, “Wrath of God (NT),” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 6, ed. David Noel Freeman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 996-98; and Leon Morris, “Wrath of God,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 732.

⁸⁷Verlyn D. Verbrugge, “ὀργή,” in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, abr. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 417.

indicate more than just reprobation.⁸⁸ Consider John 3:36, which states, “whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God *remains* on him.” What is the essence of this abiding wrath upon those who do not believe and obey Jesus Christ? John 3:18-19 assist us here. Jesus said that whoever does not believe in him “is condemned already”; divine judgment has come upon him (cf. John 16:8-11).

Finally, in light of the discussion on justice, righteousness and wrath, how should we perceive the nature of God in atonement theology? P. T. Forsyth comments, “[God] must either inflict punishment or assume it. And he chose the latter course, as honouring the law while saving the guilty. He took his own judgment.”⁸⁹ Stott concurs, saying, “For in order to save us in such a way as to satisfy himself, God through Christ substituted himself for us. Divine love triumphed over divine wrath by divine self-sacrifice. The cross was an act simultaneously of punishment and amnesty, severity and grace, justice and mercy.”⁹⁰ Notice the key to Stott’s argument: *God through Christ substituted himself for us*. Unless the trinitarian nature of God in atonement theology is established and understood, the feminist critique cannot be suitably answered appropriately.

⁸⁸This is a common argument concerning the wrath of God. See R. V. G. Tasker, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Wrath of God* (London: Tyndale, 1951); A. T. Hanson, *The Wrath of the Lamb* (London: SPCK, 1957); and especially Stephen H. Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God* (Basingstoke, England: Marshall Pickering, 1986), 31-44; idem, “Christ as Bearer of Divine Judgment in Paul’s Thought about the Atonement,” in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ*, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 332-45; and idem, “The Doctrine of Atonement: Popular Evangelicalism and The Bible,” *Catalyst* 22, no. 1 (1995): 1-3.

⁸⁹P. T. Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross* (London: Independent, 1948), 205-06.

⁹⁰Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 159.

Trinitarian considerations. McGill-Cobbler states, “Recent critiques of penal imagery [from feminists] recognize the central problematic as the image of God depicted in the penal theory.” Their critique is that “penal theories can threaten to divide the Trinity, depicting the Father as a vindictive judge, and the Son as the loving savior who is willing that humanity be saved, meekly endures an undeserved death. Perhaps the Son is for us, but the Father appears to be against both us and the Son.”⁹¹ The interesting point of this critique is the religious feminist claim that classical (biblical) presentations of the atonement affect the Trinity. Certainly, if feminists reject Chalcedonian Christology, then they cannot have a true, biblical Trinitarian theology. The reason why they posit the Father as an angry, abusive God and Jesus as the obedient, abused Son is because they do not properly understand (nor accept) orthodox Trinitarian theology.⁹² Therefore, Van Dyk argues, “The most glaring error of many feminist criticisms of atonement and christology relates to the doctrine of the Trinity. The claim is made that atonement theology is ‘divine child abuse’; this implies that the relationship between the Father and the Son is one of domination, control, and punitive anger.”⁹³ Van Dyk’s analysis of the feminist error related to Trinitarian issues rightly denotes that feminist theology presupposes that the Father and the Son are not united in either essence or purpose.

⁹¹Megill-Cobbler, “A Feminist Rethinking,” 17.

⁹²Note that this inference is related to the feminist position considered in this dissertation. Not all feminists reject orthodox Trinitarian distinctions, however, but most do in some fashion. Even some evangelical feminists are questioning certain Trinitarian aspects, such as the Son’s subordination to the Father. For discussion of this issue, see Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), and Idem, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006).

⁹³Van Dyk, “Do Theories of Atonement Foster Abuse,” 25-26.

As mentioned above, feminists often reject the deity of Jesus Christ, so the only explanatory option for the cross is rooted in the humanity of Jesus alone. God may be present in Jesus' suffering, in the sense of solidarity, but feminists do not view Jesus *as God* suffering and dying on the cross. Donald Bloesch comments that any theory that makes atonement "exclusively or primarily by Jesus Christ the man" leads to a logical separation between "the Son, who is pure love, from the Father, who is depicted as holiness and wrath."⁹⁴ But this disjointing of Father and Son does not portray proper atonement theology. Instead, as Richard Mouw notes, "It is important to emphasize the fact that the work of the cross . . . is itself an integrated act of the Triune God."⁹⁵ Atonement theology—that is, notes John Thompson, "the cross and resurrection as the acts of Father and Son"—"give a certain shape to the Trinity and the intradivine relationships. They show God as Father majestic, gracious in loving relationship with the Son, with him in his coming, passion, and death. They show the Son as obedient in humility unto death, triumphant in it, overcoming it and all God's enemies."⁹⁶ These understandings of the integrated act of the Triune God in atonement, as well as the intradivine relationship between the Father and the Son have been fundamental beliefs of the Christian faith throughout the history of the Church.⁹⁷

⁹⁴Donald G. Bloesch, *God, Authority, and Salvation*, vol. 1 of *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (Peabody, MA: Prince, 2001), 160. Note also John Stott's response to this idea in *The Cross of Christ*, 156ff.

⁹⁵Richard J. Mouw, "Violence and the Atonement," in *Must Christianity Be Violent?* ed. Kenneth R. Chase and Alan Jacobs (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003), 171.

⁹⁶John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 46.

⁹⁷Especially articulated by the Reformed Orthodox notion of *pactum salutis* or the covenant of redemption, that is, the eternal purpose of the Triune God, in mutual love,

A critical distinction between feminist theology and evangelical theology on this point is whether or not the Father and the Son are *objects* or *subjects* of the atonement—that is, respectively, if they actively purpose and accomplish redemption or if they passively receive the punishment of the cross. Margo Houts rightly argues that the “Bible teaches that both God and Jesus were subjects, not objects of the atonement (2 Cor 5:18-20; Rom 8:3; John 10:18; Gal 2:20; Eph 5:25).” Nevertheless, whenever the Father only is viewed as the subject, the “unfortunate result is that God’s character is maligned and Christianity comes to be caricatured as an abusive religion.”⁹⁸ Both the Father and the Son are initiators and agents of the atonement. Houts concludes, “When this double focus is lost, when Jesus ceases to be divine, or when the unity of the Godhead is compromised, a distortion of the biblical image results, and the Father acquires an abusive, tyrant-like disposition.”⁹⁹ Houts’ insight describes the error of feminist theologians in this regard. Because they make Jesus the object of the cross, *unjustly* taking the wrath and punishment of God, then a distorted biblical picture results; namely, God is an abusive, sadistic father and the cross is “divine child abuse.”

Yet if the Father and the Son are *both* subjects of the atonement, then they necessarily share not only unity of essence (Heb 1:3), but also unity of purpose (John 6:38; 17:4). Nonetheless, some have misappropriated this trinitarian emphasis for atonement theology. For example, J. Denny Weaver argues that because the orthodox trinitarian formulation emphasizes that both the Father and the Son share and participate

to accomplish the salvation of the elect. See Richard A. Muller, *The Trinity of God*, vol. 4 of *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 265-67.

⁹⁸Houts, “Classical Atonement Imagery,” 5.

⁹⁹Houts, “Atonement and Abuse,” 30.

in all the divine attributes, “then it would be a contradiction for Jesus to be nonviolent [as is Weaver’s thesis] and for God to bring about salvation through divinely orchestrated violence, through a scheme in which justice depended on violent retribution.”¹⁰⁰

Weaver’s assertion, although making appeal to the orthodox trinitarian formulation, actually denies an essential element of trinitarian thought: that the Father and the Son are united not only in divine attributes but also in essence and purpose. Indeed, the cross, in all its violent depiction, was a part of the plan of redemption before the creation of the world (Acts 2:22-23), because Jesus was as the lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev 13:8; cf. 1 Pet 1:19-20). Weaver’s claim, however seemingly novel, does not rightly appropriate trinitarian theology with regard to the atonement.

Jürgen Moltmann, to whom feminist theology is often indebted, also misapplies trinitarian theology with relation to the atonement. Thompson notes that Moltmann is one of several theologians who deem the cross as the key to the trinitarian nature of God.¹⁰¹ Yet for Moltmann in particular, the Father actually suffers with the Son on the cross due to their trinitarian nature and essence. He argues that this is not “patripassianism” (the suffering of the Father) but “patricompassianism” (the suffering of the Father *with* the Son).¹⁰² But there is more: Moltmann’s thesis is that suffering is an ontological necessity for the nature of God. This leads Richard Bauckham to conclude

¹⁰⁰Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, 203-04.

¹⁰¹Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives*, 58. Moltmann’s trinitarian views are expounded in Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); and idem, *The Crucified God*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (London: SCM, 1974). Thompson examines not only Moltmann but also the views of Eberhard Jüngel, Karl Barth, and Hans Urs von Balthasar on this point.

¹⁰²Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 243-44.

that “the temptation, which Moltmann from *The Crucified God* onwards seems unable to resist, to see the cross as the key to the doctrine of God, not only in the sense that it reveals God as the kind of God who is willing to suffer, but in the sense that the actual sufferings of the cross are essential to who God is.”¹⁰³ John Thompson, commenting on Karl Barth’s perspective of the cross, concludes: although the “hardness of the cross cannot be evaded, its fuller meaning is the unity of the Father and Son in reconciliation.”¹⁰⁴ This unity in atonement theology is essential to the evangelical response to the feminist critique. In their view, the Father and Son are at odds with each other in the cross event.

Evangelical theology (reflecting orthodox trinitarianism), however, insists that the only explanation for the cross event is the unity of the Father and the Son in essence and purpose. Thus, the result is that God has satisfied himself through Jesus his Son. Mouw notes, “The very same God who pours out the divine wrath is the One who experiences the wrathful forsakenness of divine abandonment. God, in the unity of the divine being, is both the violated One and the One who counts that violatedness as satisfying the demands of eternal justice.”¹⁰⁵ Atonement, then, is not just about God or just about Christ, “but God *in Christ*, who was truly and fully both God and man, and who on that account was uniquely qualified to represent both God and man and to

¹⁰³Richard J. Bauckham, *Moltmann: Messianic Theology in the Making* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1987), 109. If Moltmann argues that suffering is essential to who God is, and if humanity is created in his image, then does this not postulate that suffering is an essential component to our existence as humans?

¹⁰⁴Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives*, 53.

¹⁰⁵Mouw, “Violence and the Atonement,” 171.

mediate between them.”¹⁰⁶ Stott concludes that the “New Testament authors never attribute the atonement either to Christ in such a way as to disassociate him from the Father, or to God in such a way as to dispense with Christ, but rather to God and Christ, or to God acting in and through Christ with his whole-hearted concurrence.”¹⁰⁷ Indeed, this is Paul’s argument in 2 Corinthians 5:14-19. In light of the death of Christ (5:14-15) and the dynamic change of regeneration (5:17), Paul states: “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, *in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself*” (5:18-19, emphasis mine). Finally, the trinitarian unity of essence and purpose in the atonement is clearly seen in Colossians 2:19-20: “For in him [Jesus Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”

Answering Feminist Implications of the Cross: Does Classical Atonement Theology Beget Abuse?

In light of the feminist allegation that traditional atonement theology fosters abuse, evangelical Kenneth Jensen appropriately remarks, “Responding to the feminist critique must do more than merely reaffirm the theological reasons for the atonement. Our response must take seriously the issue that atonement imagery has been used, intentionally or not, to subjugate women. The challenge of the feminist critique calls

¹⁰⁶Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 156. See also D. M. Baillie, *God Was In Christ* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1948), 157-202; and Garry Williams, “The Cross and the Punishment for Sin,” in *Where Wrath and Mercy Meet*, ed. David Peterson (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2001), 68-99.

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

Evangelicals who affirm penal substitution to ever-increasing clarity to avoid misinterpretation and misuse of the doctrine.”¹⁰⁸ In fact, if we do not clarify both the theological and practical responses to the feminist critique, the assumption remains that the “cross of Christ becomes the instrument for sending the abused wife back to her husband for another beating, for making all sorts of victims more inclined to accept their victimization without protest.”¹⁰⁹

Feminists certainly argue this line of thinking and “recognize the cross, the central signifier in traditional affirmations of the redemptive effect of Jesus’ suffering and death, as a ‘theologically and ethically dangerous’ symbol that ‘has functioned as an instrument of violence—spiritual, psychological, physical—from the first century onward.”¹¹⁰ But Leanne Van Dyk counters this assertion, saying, “Although, tragically, the doctrine of the atonement has sometimes been subverted to legitimate violence, it is claiming too much to state that the doctrine of the atonement itself is abusive.”¹¹¹ Van Dyk’s assertion is well-taken, since improper application or interpretation of a doctrine does not invalidate the doctrine itself. For example, the doctrine of unconditional election is not proven wrong on the grounds that some proponents wrongly appeal to its

¹⁰⁸Jensen, “‘Divine Child Abuse,’” 4. Although Jensen does not accept the feminist rejection of penal substitution, he positively affirms that the cross inaugurates a new, egalitarian community that should repudiate patriarchalism. He did not expand this claim or offer and practical implications resultant of the creation of a new, egalitarian community.

¹⁰⁹Placher, “Christ Takes Our Place,” 7.

¹¹⁰Ray, *Deceiving the Devil*, 61, quoting from Sally B. Purvis, *The Power of the Cross: Foundations for a Christian Feminist Ethic of Community* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 14.

¹¹¹Van Dyk, “Do Theories of Atonement Foster Abuse?” 24.

truth in order to reject missiological endeavor or evangelistic zeal. Likewise, the doctrine of the atonement is not invalidated simply because some who embrace its traditional expressions sinfully commit domestic abuse.

Margo Houts disagrees with the feminist claim that the cross itself is a “theologically and ethically dangerous symbol.” She argues that feminists begin “with the reality of abusive social patterns whose roots *may* lie in theological systems. [Feminists are] convinced that God’s involvement in the crucifixion makes God into a sadistic tyrant and Jesus into a masochistic victim, and that this imagery perpetuates a cycle of victimization, violence, and abuse in human relationships. The problem with [feminist] analysis is that it is based on nonbiblical understandings of the Godhead and the incarnation.”¹¹²

What then should be our (sensitive) response to this feminist allegation that the cross perpetuates violence and abuse? First, we should follow Houts’ insight that “it is possible to differentiate between redemptive suffering and masochistic suffering.”¹¹³ That is, the cross of Jesus Christ reflects a qualitatively different category of suffering—redemptive suffering. Masochistic suffering involves the willing acceptance of abuse by a victim because he or she believes it is deserved. But redemptive suffering is different, in that it yields righteous fruit and achieves the redemptive ends of healing, forgiveness, and salvation. In this manner, Jesus’ suffering on the cross is not masochistic, but redemptive (Isa 53:4-12; Col 1:13-14, 20-22; Rev 5:9-13). In addition,

¹¹²Houts, “Atonement and Abuse,” 31.

¹¹³Ibid., 30.

those who suffer for righteousness' sake (1 Pet 3:8-4:2) are privileged to share in the sufferings of Christ (1 Pet 5:10; cf. also Rom 8:18; Phil 3:7-11).¹¹⁴

Second, Richard Mouw's reaction to the violence of the cross further assists us here. He writes, "If the forsakenness, the experience of cursedness, is what is in the most basic sense the redemptive significance of Christ's substitutionary work, then there is something important about Christ's suffering *that cannot be imitated*, namely the experience of being abandoned by God."¹¹⁵ How does this answer the feminist allegation? Mouw concludes, "[Jesus'] suffering is in significant ways inimitable, because he bore the wrath of our cursed existence precisely in order that we do not have to suffer under that wrath. And this is important to emphasize with reference to the kinds of examples raised by [feminists who] worry that the Bible's depiction of the atoning work of Christ might encourage, say, women to think they must patiently endure spousal abuse. In such cases, the most basic consideration for a woman in that kind of situation is to know that Christ has suffered the abandonment and abuse on her behalf, and that she does not need to endure those experiences in order to please God."¹¹⁶ Thus, acceptance of abuse is unnecessary and certainly unwarranted as a result of the cross, in opposition to the feminist critique. This approach need not minimize the reality of violence and abuse

¹¹⁴There are manifold examples of believers throughout the history of the church that display in the story of their lives the privilege of suffering for Christ's sake, from Stephen to Polycarp to Jan Hus to Corrie ten Boom.

¹¹⁵Mouw, "Violence and the Atonement," 169, emphasis mine. This forsakenness, according to Mouw, is the essence of the wrath of God. And if God's expression of wrath is eschatological (as noted above), then no one can truly experience God-forsakenness or abandonment by God. Thus, the suffering of Christ on the cross, bearing the wrath of God (or his abandonment), is unique to Christ until final judgment.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, 170. In addition, we should also conclude likewise that men are not sanctioned by God to abuse women or assume lordship over them.

in human relationships; rather, the emphasis is that Christ has endured the cross so that we need not accept and endure masochistic suffering. His redemptive suffering is enough, and we are not able (nor are we instructed) to replicate his atoning work.

Third, evangelicals may respond to feminist critiques by publicly voicing their protest against any and all forms of domestic spousal and child abuse. While there is a growing corpus of evangelical response to abuse,¹¹⁷ much more needs to be offered because of the egregious presence of abuse in the church and in the home, as well as the continual allegation that orthodox theological commitments foster this abuse. Additional discussion of this issue will be offered in chapter five of this dissertation.

Fourth, evangelicals should practice church discipline for situations of abuse. Practicing church discipline has biblical warrant (Matt 18:15-17; 1 Cor 5:1-11; Heb 12:1-14; 2 Thess 3:6-15; 2 Tim 5:19-20; Titus 3:9-11) and historical precedent, particularly in Baptist life.¹¹⁸ Discipline is both preventative and corrective, both positive and negative.¹¹⁹ Preventatively, pastors and teachers need to proclaim and clarify biblical issues such as equality, authority, and submission in marriage, and also offer biblical instruction that challenges and equips men and women to live humbly and lovingly before God and each other. Correctively, sin must be confronted and rebuked (Luke 17:3; cf.

¹¹⁷Steven R. Tracy, "Patriarchy and Domestic Violence: Challenging Common Misconceptions," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 3 (2007): 573-94.

¹¹⁸See Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), chap. 7; and Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹¹⁹See Jay E. Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), chaps. 2-3. Note also Daniel E. Wray, *Biblical Church Discipline* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1978).

Matt 18:15-20). Pastors and elders must speak out against abuse and seek healing for those who have been abused and accountability for those who are abusers.¹²⁰ Further, confrontation of abusive sins should seek restoration and reconciliation, and for this reason the correction should be carried out in a spirit of gentleness (Gal 6:1). Church discipline can be an excellent tool and practice for churches seeking to biblically confront abuse and violence.

Conclusion

Darby Kathleen Ray comments, “According to many feminist theologians, we need to be saved *from* the doctrine of the atonement, from any claim that suffering or death—whether God’s or humans’—is meaningful. To make meaning out of suffering and death, it is argued, merely perpetuates them, and any religion or belief that does such a thing is demonic. God is a God of life, not death; God is life-giving, not death-dealing.”¹²¹ For feminist theologians, there is never any redemptive quality in suffering or death.

So then, does the feminist critique of atonement theology as “divine child abuse” hold? Having assessed their analysis of the classical atonement theories, as well as feminist theological and practical assumptions related to the doctrine of the atonement, I must answer negatively. In perspective, theological method is the key to the dissonance between feminist theology and evangelical theology. That is, evangelicals begin with

¹²⁰See Steven R. Tracy, *Mending the Soul: Understanding and Healing Abuse* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005). Tracy is right to point out that abuse is not isolated to women only, but also often includes children, and addresses this issue throughout his book (and especially in the appendices).

¹²¹Ray, *Deceiving the Devil*, 84.

Scripture and its authority and then theologize from the biblical data. On the other hand, feminists begin with experience as the basis for theological reflection.¹²² Starting from vastly different sources or authority, feminists and evangelicals will differ drastically on the nature of God, Christ, and salvation, as demonstrated in this dissertation.

Nonetheless, in light of the feminist critique of atonement theology, John Stott offers a fitting conclusion:

But we have no liberty to interpret [the Bible] in such a way as to imply either that God compelled Jesus to do what he was unwilling to do himself, or that Jesus was an unwilling victim of God's harsh justice. Jesus Christ did indeed bear the penalty of our sins, but God was active in and through Christ doing it, and Christ was freely playing his part (*e.g.* Heb. 10:5-10).

We must not, then, speak of God punishing Jesus or of Jesus persuading God, for to do so is to set them over against each other as if they acted independently of each other or were even in conflict with each other. We must never make Christ the object of God's punishment or God the object of Christ's persuasion, for both God and Christ were subjects not objects, taking the initiative together to save sinners. Whatever happened on the cross in terms of "God-forsakenness" was voluntarily accepted by both in the same holy love which made the atonement necessary . . . [and there] is no suspicion anywhere in the New Testament of discord between the Father and the Son.¹²³

¹²²See chap. 2 on feminist theological method above.

¹²³Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 151.

CHAPTER 5

ASSESSING THE INFLUENCE OF FEMINIST CHRISTOLOGY IN EVANGELICALISM

Introduction

The previous chapters of this dissertation have delineated the contours of feminist theological method and feminist Christological formulation, related to both Christ's person and work. Such data—criticisms, as well as revisions and proposals—arises from both post-Christian (secular) and religious feminists sources, with the majority allocated to the latter. Their views may appear to be radical and ostentatious, especially in contrast to orthodox, evangelical theology. Nevertheless, many of the feminist criticisms and proposals mentioned above have found an eager reception in evangelical thought.

The purpose of this chapter, in light of the dissertation's thesis, is to demonstrate the influence of feminist theological criticisms and proposals within the evangelical theological community. Such influence has resulted in significant revisions of the Christian doctrines of God, Scripture, and ecclesiology. In addition, evangelicals are witnessing emerging revisions in Christology as some attempt to weave feminist criticisms and ideas into a burgeoning egalitarian understanding of Christ's person and work. These egalitarian Christological revisions will be examined, challenged, and found unacceptable for a decidedly evangelical theology.

Increasing Affinity for Feminist Criticisms Among Evangelicals

One does not need to search hard to find an evangelical affinity for feminist criticisms.¹ Colin Greene, for example, argues that feminist proposals should be accepted gladly as important developments within the Christological tradition.² John Stackhouse also insists that a feminist voice belongs at the evangelical table:

Even among those orthodox theologians who seem most open to contemporary currents in theology—whether process thought, liberationism, postliberalism, and so on—and who call for renewal or ‘revisioning’ of orthodox theology, feminist analysis is scarcely evident. But if good fruit can be harvested from these other nonorthodox theological discourses, why not from feminist studies?³

Perhaps Stackhouse’s query indicates a trend in evangelical scholarship to imbibe criticisms from other traditions in order to shift evangelical theology leftward—particularly with reference to Scripture and theology proper.⁴

Another example of evangelical affinity for feminist criticisms is found in Nicola Hoggard Creegan and Christine Pohl’s *Living on the Boundaries*.⁵ The authors’

¹This assertion should not be taken to mean that *all* feminist criticisms are illegitimate or absurd. For example, evangelicals can and should benefit from the feminist reaction to the abuses of patriarchy, which will be discussed below. Nevertheless, evangelicals must be discerning of such criticisms, even though they may accurately signal an area in evangelical thought that needs attention and clarification.

²Colin J. D. Greene, *Christology in Cultural Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 239-45.

³John G. Stackhouse Jr., *Finally Feminist: A Pragmatic Christian Understanding of Gender* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 127.

⁴Consider Gary Dorrien, *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998); and Robert Brow, “Evangelical Megashift,” *Christianity Today* 34, no. 3 (1990): 12-14.

⁵Nicola Hoggard Creegan and Christine D. Pohl, *Living on the Boundaries: Evangelical Women, Feminism and the Theological Academy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005).

stated intention is to “live on the boundaries” between evangelicalism and feminism, attempting to find a home in each simultaneously. Throughout the monograph, Creegan and Pohl seem all too eager to make connections with the broader feminist movement, although they minimize the actual disparagement of theological convictions between evangelicals and feminists regarding sin and salvation, and Scripture and experience.⁶

For example, Creegan and Pohl argue that “Evangelicals might well embrace certain feminist voices, but they [should] not quickly discard parts of the [biblical] text, even where they are difficult. Boundary living encourages a dwelling within the text, placing and drawing the received narrative back together.”⁷ They add, “In the boundary between feminism and evangelicalism, the interaction between Scripture and experience can be affirmed. . . . Experience and narrative then become a common and unlikely bond between feminism and evangelicalism.”⁸ Creegan and Pohl do not, however, tell us how in this interaction an evangelical approach is demarcated from the methodological commitments of feminist scholars and theologians like Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Rosemary Radford Ruether, or Phyllis Trible.⁹ The problem is, such thinking is clearly one-sided, and it represents an attempt to acquiesce to feminist criticisms without embracing their assumptions and methodology. Feminists do not see things the way Creegan and Pohl see them with reference to the Bible or experience.

⁶Ibid., 135-39 and 164-69.

⁷Ibid., 164-65.

⁸Ibid., 165-66.

⁹See chap. 2 of this dissertation on feminist theological method (above) or consult the bibliography for representative works.

These examples are merely a window into an increasing trend among evangelicals to embrace feminist ideologies and proposals. But where is the feminist influence showing itself in evangelical theology? The following sections demonstrate that the feminist influence is seen among egalitarian evangelicals' rejection of patriarchy and revisions in the doctrines of God, Scripture, ecclesiology, and Christology.

Rejection of Patriarchy

A fundamental principle in feminist ideology is that patriarchy is *the* enemy to egalitarian progress.¹⁰ The difficulty with such a sweeping claim is that “patriarchy” is rarely defined by feminists but used frequently to denote a broad range of ideologies and behaviors.¹¹ That is, some feminists define patriarchy as androcentrism (or male-centeredness),¹² some as sexism,¹³ and others (particularly egalitarian evangelicals) in terms of complementarian male headship or its pejorative epithet, hierarchicalism.¹⁴ Whatever the definition, “patriarchy” is unanimously denounced because of the ill-effects it has produced (allegedly) in the home, church, and society at large.

¹⁰Lisa Isherwood and Dorothea McEwan, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield, England: Sheffield, 2001), 95.

¹¹Steven R. Tracy, “Patriarchy and Domestic Violence: Challenging Common Misconceptions,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 3 (2007): 581.

¹²Anne E. Carr, *Transforming Grace: Christian Tradition and Women's Experience* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 136-37; and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, ed., *After Eden: Facing the Challenge of Gender Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 121.

¹³Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Nancy A. Hardesty, *All We're Meant to Be: Biblical Feminism for Today*, 3rd rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 1.

¹⁴Del Birkey, “The Patriarchs are Coming!” *Priscilla Papers* 14, no. 2 (2000): 17ff. See also idem, *The Fall of Patriarchy* (Tucson, AZ: Fenestra, 2005). *Priscilla Papers* is the egalitarian counterpart to *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*.

This feminist critique of patriarchy is gaining significant momentum in evangelical thought. For instance, Alan Padgett resolutely declares that “patriarchy is not part of the grammar of orthodoxy”; that is, although patriarchy is represented in the Bible, it is a cultural assumption of the authors.¹⁵ He concludes, “Patriarchy is finally pagan, not Christian.”¹⁶ Del Birkey agrees, chiding complementarian evangelicals for their insistence that patriarchy belongs indigenously to Christianity.¹⁷ Moreover, egalitarians are consistent in their affirmation that patriarchy—to be defined here in terms of male headship in the family and in the church—is a direct consequence of the Fall.¹⁸ Without question, this notion is a fundamental claim of every egalitarian theologian,¹⁹ and it must be so if egalitarians wish to ground the absolution of patriarchy in their favored interpretation of Galatians 3:28, which is the *locus classicus* of the egalitarian position.²⁰

¹⁵Alan G. Padgett, “Is God Masculine?” *Priscilla Papers* 16, no. 4 (2002): 16-18.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁷Birkey, “The Patriarchs are Coming!” 17. The tenor of Birkey’s article appears elitist and condescending toward complementarians, which seems inimical to what I would expect from those who champion unfeigned equality.

¹⁸Richard Hess, “Equality with and without Innocence: Genesis 1-3,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 79-95; and Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says about a Woman’s Place in Church and Family*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006).

¹⁹Wayne Grudem, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism: Biblical Responses to the Key Questions* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2006), 71.

²⁰Gordon D. Fee, “Male and Female in the New Creation: Galatians 3:26-29,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 172-85; Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, *Good News for Women: A Biblical Picture of Gender Equality* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 25-26; and Klyne Snodgrass, “Galatians 3:28: Conundrum or Solution?” in *Women, Authority and the Bible*, ed. Alvera Mickelson

In contrast, complementarian evangelicals deny that male headship is the result of the Fall but that it is part and parcel of God's creation intentions. Wayne Grudem provides ten reasons that demonstrate male headship existed before the Fall:²¹

1. *The order*: Adam was created first, then Eve (note the sequence in Gen 2:7 and 2:18-23; 1 Tim 2:13).
2. *The representation*: Adam, not Eve, had a special role in representing the human race (1 Cor 15:2, 45-49; Rom 5:12-21).
3. *The naming of woman*: Adam named Eve; Eve did not name Adam (Gen 2:23).
4. *The naming of the human race*: God named the human race "Man," not "Woman" (Gen 5:2).
5. *The primary accountability*: God called Adam to account first after the Fall (Gen 3:9).
6. *The purpose*: Eve was created as a helper for Adam, not Adam as a helper for Eve (Gen 2:18; 1 Cor 11:9).
7. *The conflict*: The curse brought a distortion of previous roles, not the introduction of new roles (Gen 3:16).
8. *The restoration*: Salvation in Christ in the New Testament reaffirms the creation order (Col 3:18-19).
9. *The mystery*: Marriage from the beginning of creation was a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph 5:32-33).
10. *The parallel with the Trinity*: The equality, differences, and unity between men and women reflect the equality, differences, and unity in the Trinity (1 Cor 11:3).

Another point might be added to Grudem's list:

11. *The manner*: Eve was created out of Adam, not Adam from Eve (1 Cor 11:8-12).²²

(Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 161-81.

²¹Grudem, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism*, 72. See Grudem's expanded treatment of these reasons on pp. 20-24. Of course, there are numerous responses to Grudem's position from various egalitarian authors. See, e.g., Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles*; Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002); Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, *Good News for Women: A Biblical Picture of Gender Equality* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997); Patricia Gundry, *Heirs Together: Mutual Submission in Marriage* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980); Aída Besançon Spencer, *Beyond the Curse: Women Called to Ministry* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985); and Sarah Sumner, *Men and Women in the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003).

²²I am indebted to Gregg Allison for insight on this point.

The affirmation or rejection of patriarchy, it seems, follows one's belief on either side of this issue: if patriarchy is the result of the Fall, then the atonement overturns it along with every other sin. But if patriarchy (i.e., male headship) exists before the Fall, then there must be acceptance of this divine ordering for human relationships and a willingness to live out God's creation intentions for the home and the church. Of course, there is no biblical text that says, "patriarchy existed before the Fall." Grudem's ten reasons, however, are demonstrative of the representation and accountability of male headship in the unfolding narrative of Genesis 1-2, prior to the Fall in Genesis 3.²³

Patriarchy and abuse. In addition to the claim that patriarchy is the result of the Fall, egalitarian evangelicals claim another particular justification for the rejection of patriarchy. Intrinsicly tied to the call for patriarchy's demise is the belief that patriarchy provides the framework and underpinning of domestic abuse and violence. Egalitarians have accepted the feminist allegation that domestic abuse logically flows from a patriarchal worldview. Elaine Heath contends, "At its core, violence against women is the logical conclusion of patriarchy."²⁴ Cynthia Ezell concurs, arguing that "patriarchal attitudes founded in religious beliefs contribute to the abuse and subjugation of women within marital relationships."²⁵ Clinical psychotherapist Carolyn Holderread Heggen

²³See also Raymond C. Ortlund Jr., "Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Genesis 1-3," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Biblical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 95-112.

²⁴Elaine A. Heath, "The Levite's Concubine: Domestic Violence and the People of God," *Priscilla Papers* 13, no. 1 (1999): 12. Cf. Anne Borrowdale, *Distorted Images* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991).

²⁵Cynthia Ezell, "Power, Patriarchy, and Abusive Marriages," in *Healing the Hurting: Giving Hope and Help to Abused Women*, ed. Catherine Clark Kroeger and

further insists, “The inherent logic of patriarchy says that since men have the right to dominance and control, they also have the right to enforce that control. It is this control-over component of patriarchy and its assumptions of ownership of women and children by men that make it vulnerable to violence and abuse.”²⁶

In support of this allegation, feminists and egalitarian evangelicals point to a number of biblical narratives that apparently illustrate this point. Phyllis Trible’s *Texts of Terror* is replete with examples of heinous crimes done to women by men in the Bible.²⁷ Pamela Cooper-White’s *The Cry of Tamar* selects 2 Samuel 13 as a paradigm for the egregious data of patriarchal abuses in the Bible, as well as a guide for recognizing and addressing violence and abuse in today’s culture.²⁸ Elaine Heath examines the story of the rape and murder of the Levite’s concubine in Judges 19:1-30 and typologically applies this scenario to the patriarchal Christian home.²⁹ Are these examples enough to jettison

James R. Beck (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 16.

²⁶Carolyn Holderread Heggen, “Religious Beliefs and Abuse,” in *Women, Abuse and the Bible: How Scripture Can Be Used to Hurt or to Heal*, ed. Catherine Clark Kroeger and James R. Beck (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 17.

²⁷Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

²⁸Pamela Cooper-White, *The Cry of Tamar: Violence Against Women and the Church’s Response* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995). Particularly insightful is chap. 2, “Images of Women: Pornography and the Connection to Violence.”

²⁹Heath, “The Levite’s Concubine.” See n. 23 for full bibliographic citation. Daniel Block provides an excellent counter-response to Heath’s argument. He states, “Contemporary feminist approaches tend to see in this account evidences for the fundamental injustices of patriarchy. But this is to miss the point. Instead of asking why heterosexual rape is preferable to homosexual rape (as if it is good in any sense at all), we should be asking, ‘What is it about homosexual rape that makes it worse even than heterosexual rape?’ In no way does this episode reflect acceptable treatment of women by men in any context. The Scriptures are unequivocal in their denunciation of sexual crimes by men against women. Male violations of female sexuality are characterized

patriarchy, if indeed it is found to lead to violence and abuse? Heggen believes so, stating that “we cannot both support patriarchy and stop domestic abuse. To stop violence among our families, we must stop holding up patriarchy as God’s intention for us.”³⁰ Egalitarian evangelicals are also quick to point out that complementarians have inadequately addressed the issue of abuse in light of their support for patriarchy and male headship.³¹ David Scholer rebukes complementarians for being silent on the issue, at least in terms of articles allocated in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*.³² Surprisingly, then, is the fact that the counterpart for the egalitarian position, *Discovering Biblical Equality*, does not contain an article dedicated to abuse either.

But more to the point: the assertion that complementarians have not addressed the issue of domestic abuse is simply not accurate.³³ From its inception, the

elsewhere as *nēbālā* and a violation of the clearly and unequivocally revealed will of Yahweh in the Torah. Whatever one makes of the social structures of ancient Israel, by the nation’s normative standards both rape and adultery were heinous crimes. They are never acceptable forms of behavior by men or women.” See Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, New American Commentary, vol. 6 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 543.

³⁰Heggen, “Religious Beliefs and Abuse,” 18.

³¹David M. Scholer, “The Evangelical Debate over Biblical ‘Headship’,” in *Women, Abuse and the Bible: How Scripture Can Be Used to Hurt or to Heal*, ed. Catherine Clark Kroeger and James R. Beck (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 30-31.

³²Ibid. Scholer does identify three references: John Piper and Wayne Grudem, “An Overview of Central Concerns: Questions and Answers,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Biblical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 62; James A. Borland, “Women in the Life and Teachings of Jesus,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Biblical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 114; and Wayne Grudem, “Wives Like Sarah, and the Husbands Who Honor Them,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Biblical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 201 n. 13.

³³Contra Tracy, “Patriarchy and Domestic Violence,” 590-91. Tracy’s point is well-taken, however, in that compared with the egalitarian monographs produced on this

complementarian organization Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) has opposed domestic violence and abuse. In fact, the first journal of CBMW contains an article directly addressing abuse.³⁴ Complementarians have addressed this topic seriously and repeatedly.³⁵ Russell Moore rightly contends that this charge is nothing more than a “red herring,” although “among the weaker segment of complementarians,” some raise this same indictment because of their “tacit acceptance of a fallacious egalitarian charge: that male headship leads to abuse.”³⁶

In addition, clinical studies do not support the claim that patriarchy or male headship logically leads to abuse.³⁷ Sociologist W. Bradford Wilcox demonstrates that evangelical Christians who attend church regularly actually have the *lowest* rate of

topic, a sustained treatments from complementarian scholars and theologians is lacking. Tracy points only to his own work in *Mending the Soul: Understanding and Healing Abuse* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

³⁴“CBMW Issues Abuse Statement,” *CBMW News* 1, no. 1 (1995): 3 [journal on-line]; accessed 21 July 2008; available from <http://www.cbmw.org/Journal/Vol-1-No-1/CBMW-Issues-Abuse-Statement>; Internet. *CBMW News* is now *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*.

³⁵ See David Powlison, Paul David Tripp, and Edward T. Welch, “Pastoral Responses to Domestic Violence,” in *Pastoral Leadership for Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. Wayne Grudem and Dennis Rainey (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 265-76; Steven R. Tracy, “1 Corinthians 11:3: A Corrective to Distortions and Abuses of Male Headship,” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 8, no. 1 (2003): 17-22; Aimee K. Cassidy-Shaw, *Family Abuse and the Bible: The Scriptural Perspective* (New York: Haworth, 2002); and Kay Marshall Strom, *In the Name of Submission: A Painful Look at Wife Battering* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1986). With reference to n. 32 above, Steven Tracy is aware of the resources listed here.

³⁶Russell D. Moore, “After Patriarchy, What? Why Egalitarians Are Winning the Gender Debate,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49, no. 3 (2006): 576.

³⁷Tim Bayly, “Wife Abuse: Evangelical Feminists’ Stalking-Horse,” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 5, no. 1 (2000): 22.

domestic abuse among all other groups in the United States.³⁸ Likewise, psychologist Donald Dutton shows that there is no direct relationship between patriarchy and abuse; thus, he challenges feminists to come up with another explanation for domestic abuse, because 90 percent of men raised under patriarchy are nonassaultive. The issue, Dutton claims, is that unstable men use patriarchal teachings to justify their abuse of women.³⁹

Conclusion. Is patriarchy the spectre hiding behind all forms of abuse and violence, as feminists claim? As demonstrated above, a many egalitarian evangelicals hold that the feminist assumption is correct and, as a result, the curse of patriarchy must be overcome.⁴⁰ On the contrary, complementarian evangelicals call for a retention of patriarchy for Christian theology, albeit clarified against its abuses and distortions.⁴¹

Complementarians cannot emphasize strongly enough a disdain for and repudiation of domestic violence and abuse in any form. The foundation and source of domestic abuse, however, is not patriarchy, but sin. Sin is at the core of abuse and

³⁸W. Bradford Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

³⁹Donald G. Dutton, "Patriarchy and Wife Assault: The Ecological Fallacy," *Violence and Victims* 9 (1994): 167-82. See also the expanded work, Donald G. Dutton, *The Batterer: A Psychological Profile* (New York: Basic, 1995). For a counterpoint to this issue, that argues that men who do not view themselves as authorities over their wives are less likely to physically abuse them, see R. Marie Griffith, *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

⁴⁰Heath, "The Levite's Concubine," 16.

⁴¹For example, Moore, "After Patriarchy, What?"; and Guenther Haas, "Patriarchy as An Evil that God Tolerated: Analysis and Implications for the Authority of Scripture," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38, no. 3 (1995): 321-36. Although the concept is retained, some evangelicals prefer the moniker "complementarian" over "patriarchal" to avoid misrepresentation or derogation.

violence, regardless of religious commitments and worldviews.⁴² Wayne Grudem rightly contends that domestic abuse is “a horrible evil that should be opposed by all who believe the Bible to be the Word of God,” and that patriarchy is not to blame but rather “distortion and abuse of biblical male leadership that leads to the abuse and oppression of women.”⁴³ Moreover, Genesis 3 indicates that the introduction of sin brought specific curses, including the disruption of the relationship between man and woman: “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (Gen 3:16). What do the words “desire” and “rule” indicate? Given the discussion above, the consequential curses of Adam and Eve’s sin should not be taken to mean the introduction of male headship; rather, they represent a distortion of God’s creation intentions. Namely, the woman will “desire,” or seek to lead the man and usurp his role or position, and the man will “rule,” or harshly dominate or oppressively lord-over his wife.⁴⁴

⁴²This point is made best, unwittingly, by egalitarian Catherine Clark Kroeger, “Working Together to Listen and Learn,” in *Healing the Hurting: Giving Hope and Help to Abused Women*, ed. Catherine Clark Kroeger and James R. Beck (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 7. Kroeger tells of her prison visit to a fellow Christians for Biblical Equality member who shot and killed his wife and children (CBE is the egalitarian counterpart to CBMW). She laments, “Clearly, membership in Christians for Biblical Equality had not been enough to prevent this terrible crime, nor had his long-standing profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Both he and his wife had been raised in evangelical Christian families and had committed themselves to Christ.” Then she concludes, “Had the wider Christian community—the churches, pastors, Christian therapists, and friends—failed them both?”

It should be clear that sin, not patriarchy or egalitarianism, explains domestic abuse. Unfortunately, Kroeger does not lay the blame at the perpetrators feet, but at those who apparently have failed him to attain the *ethos* of egalitarianism. In addition, the contributions of Kroeger’s book implicitly betray her introductory testimony, in that the majority opinion claims patriarchy to be the motivation and framework for abuse.

⁴³Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than 100 Disputed Questions* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2004), 491-92.

⁴⁴Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 145-47. “Desire” (הַשְׁוֹקָה, *ššûqâ*) occurs only twice more in the Old Testament (Gen 4:7b; Song of

Paul warned husbands, however, not to be harsh with their wives, but to love them (Col 3:18-19; cf. Eph 5:25-33), implying the potential sinfulness in the way a man conducts himself toward his spouse. Peter advises husbands on this point as well, instructing them to live with their wives in an understanding way, showing honor to them (1 Pet 3:7). In sum, “The Bible nowhere teaches male leadership in the family without at the same time teaching (or implying, as in 1 Corinthians 11:11-12) that husbands should love and care for and honor their wives.”⁴⁵

Thus, complementarians oppose domestic violence and abuse alongside egalitarians and feminists.⁴⁶ The difference, however, is that complementarians do not

Sol 7:10[11]), which undergirds some of the dispute over its meaning in this verse. Although some have interpreted *t^ešûqâ* as sexual desire (linked with Song of Sol 7:10[11]), the context does not support such a view. In contrast, Susan Foh rightly argues that Genesis 4:7b offers a better explanation, where “desire” and “rule” are juxtaposed again: “Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.” Susan Foh, “What Is the Woman’s Desire?” *Westminster Theological Journal* 37 (1975): 376-83. Thus, Kenneth Mathews concludes: “If we are to take the lexical and structural similarities [between Gen 3:16 and 4:7] as intentional, we must read the verses in concert. This recommends that 3:16b also describes a struggle for mastery between the sexes. The ‘desire’ of the woman is her attempt to control her husband, but she will fail because God has ordained that the man exercise his leadership function.” Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, New American Commentary, vol. 1A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 251. In addition, although “rule” (מָשַׁל, *māšal*) is a term that describes dominion, mastery, and lordship, it is used too broadly in Scripture to “isolate its meaning in 3:16b lexically as either beneficent or tyrannical.” *Ibid.* Nonetheless, the Fall precipitated the distortion of male leadership into lordship and dominion.

⁴⁵Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 492. Along with these considerations is the complementarian belief that biblical male headship actually prevents and protects against domestic abuse. Cf. Moore, “After Patriarchy, What?” 575; and Steven Tracy, “Headship With A Heart: How Biblical Patriarchy Actually Prevents Abuse,” *Christianity Today* 47, no. 2 (2003): 50-54.

⁴⁶Steven Tracy calls for a more united front among complementarians and egalitarians against abuse, “Patriarchy and Domestic Violence,” 590-93. Interestingly, CBMW invited CBE to issue a joint statement against abuse at the annual meeting of The Evangelical Theological Society in 1994, but CBE declined. James Beck, writing on behalf of CBE Board of Directors, said, “We do not feel it would be helpful to convene a

perceive patriarchy to be a sufficient explanation for the abuses and masquerading of male headship that some use to justify their sinful behavior. There is a patriarchy that complementarians rightly oppose—the “cancerous patriarchy expressed according to Canaanite standards” that reveals itself in clear opposition to God’s good and holy will, as male superiority and dominance, homosexuality, rape, adultery, and murder.⁴⁷ As such, complementarians oppose *pagan* patriarchy, not the Judeo-Christian patriarchy revealed by “the God and *Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 1:3).⁴⁸

The rejection of patriarchy by egalitarian evangelicals demonstrates that feminist criticisms and ideology have influenced evangelical thought. Patriarchy is a polarizing, but also illuminating, issue for evangelical theology. The following sections briefly demonstrate that one’s perception of patriarchy affects Christian theology, as

joint press conference at ETS to issue a joint statement on abuse. CBE’s position on abuse flows directly out of our theological understanding of Scripture and what it teaches about gender and roles. If we attempt to issue a joint statement with an organization that differs fundamentally from us on this issue, we feel both organizations would be giving very mixed signals to their respective constituencies.” “CBE Declines Joint Statement,” *CBMW News* 1, no. 1 (1995): 3 [journal on-line]; accessed 24 July 2008; available from <http://www.cbmw.org/Journal/Vol-1-No-1/CBE-Declines-Joint-Statement>; Internet. The response from CBE is quite disappointing, in that it favors “bipartisan politics” over a unified evangelical voice against abuse. Sadly, although domestic abuse is ever-present, no further joint declaration has been pursued.

Tim Bayly makes an incisive point, given the resistance of CBE to CBMW’s request. He states, “It’s hard to tell, though, whether the goal [of egalitarians] is to stop domestic abuse, or to lead to a paradigm-shift from patriarchy to egalitarianism among the People of God.” See Bayly, “Wife Abuse,” 21. The latter appears more conspicuous.

⁴⁷Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 543.

⁴⁸Judeo-Christian patriarchy is the proper theological, not cultural, overflow from the Fatherhood of God in relation to his Son, Jesus Christ (Rom 1:7; 15:6; 1 Cor 1:3; 8:6; 15:24; 2 Cor 1:2-3; 11:31; Gal 1:1-4; Phil 1:2; 2:11; Col 1:3; 3:17; 1 Thess 1:1-3; 2 Thess 1:1-2; 1 Tim 1:2; Phlm 3; Jas 1:27; 1 Pet 1:3; 1 John 1:2-3; 2 John 1:3; Rev 2:27).

egalitarian revisions are already present in the doctrines of God, Scripture, and ecclesiology.⁴⁹

Revisions in the Doctrine of God

The work of non-evangelical feminist theologians has demonstrated consistently a call for the revision of God-language, specifically the removal of masculine imagery and nomenclature for God.⁵⁰ Masculine (or patriarchal) language in the Bible, it is argued, does not provide an adequate picture of God. Scripture also contains feminine imagery for God, feminists contest, but this data has been overlooked or suppressed by traditional theologians.

Not surprisingly, feminist criticisms of God-language have received a hearing among evangelicals who hold a traditional, orthodox view of the Bible. If feminine imagery for God is to be found in the Scriptures, then it needs to be interpreted, properly understood, and incorporated into evangelical Christian theology. Sadly, egalitarians have not only listened to feminist criticisms but have adopted them as their own in order to present a biblical-textual defense for egalitarian ideology.

Evangelical theologian Carl F. H. Henry frames the issue:

⁴⁹The attempt here is to present a succinct description of egalitarian revisions in each of the doctrines mentioned. An exhaustive engagement with the complexities of these loci is beyond the scope of this chapter and of the dissertation itself. Nevertheless, a brief investigation of these revisions will bear fruit for the primary purpose of this chapter: to show emerging *Christological* revisions among egalitarians.

⁵⁰One such example is Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, 10th anniv. ed. (New York: Crossroad, 2002). See also the helpful discussion in Randall Lee Stinson, "Religious Feminist Revisions of the God-World Relationship and Implications for Evangelical Feminism" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005), chap. 3.

Many who criticize the predominantly masculine language about God used in Christian circles deny trying to alter the meaning of the Judeo-Christian faith. Their objective is only to update biblical language and symbolism; they do not propose to change the sense of the biblical teaching. Some evangelical feminists criticize traditional theology for failing to recognize properly the feminist imagery that the Bible itself employs for God. What they want is not a revision of the biblical language, but proper deference to it.

The call to revise gender references to God assumes that the scriptural precedent of masculine terms involves a doctrine of God unacceptable to the modern mind. The biblical view is said to incorporate patriarchalist notions that need to be balanced by feminist emphases. The role of women as depicted by the Bible is declared to be unacceptable. Modern feminism identifies the biblical use of masculine terms for God with male chauvinism and female subjection; it considers the scriptural symbolism incompatible with the Genesis creation account's emphasis that God bestowed his image equally on male and female, despite the fact that the man was first, as the apostle Paul reiterates.

The question that must be asked is what bearing, if any, the linguistic precedents of Scripture have on the teaching of the Bible. The masculine-feminine tensions over biblical nomenclature cannot be satisfactorily resolved without due attention to both scriptural terms and scriptural doctrine.⁵¹

Henry's query is insightful: how does the grammatical, linguistic data of the Bible inform theological formulation? Specific scriptural terms with reference to God (both masculine and feminine) need attention, but not apart from scriptural doctrine based on the whole of divine revelation. In particular, the biblical referent "Father" poignantly illustrates this tension.

Obviously, "Father" is a masculine term, and equally as clear is the fact that God is called "Father" throughout the biblical canon. Does this name signify anything theologically about God, or is this term simply a human designation rooted in a patriarchal culture? In addition, does masculine language for God convey that God has gender? Miroslav Volf warns against "the ontologization of gender," specifically with

⁵¹Carl F. H. Henry, *God Who Stands and Stays*, pt. 1, vol. 5 of *God, Revelation and Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 159.

reference to God.⁵² His point is well-taken, given the understanding that God is not *physically* gender-specific; that is, God is a genderless God.⁵³ On the contrary, God is pure spirit (John 4:24). Physical representations of God in the Bible are interpreted rightly as anthropomorphisms, or the application of human qualities to God. Such physical descriptions of God’s activity—such as his redemptive “mighty arm” or “strong hands” (Ps 89:13), or his attentive “eyes” and “ears” toward his people (Ps 34:15)—must not be taken literally (materially), on the basis that God is incorporeal and ontologically different than any created thing (cf. Ps 115:3-8).⁵⁴

Nevertheless, characterizations of God in the Bible are predominantly masculine. Evangelicals readily concede this assertion to be true; however, there is a trend among egalitarians to emphasize the feminine imagery for God in order to open up greater potential for gender equality. For example, Michael Spooner exclaims, “Occasionally we need to open ourselves to the other images—including God as a woman—in order to allow the fresh air of new understanding to enliven us.”⁵⁵ Spooner insists that the pronoun “he” cannot be an accurate description for God; thus, evangelicals must rise above the limits of masculine language for a better doctrine of God. In

⁵²Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 172-73.

⁵³Henry, *God Who Stands and Stays*, 5:159.

⁵⁴Wayne Grudem notes that humanity’s physical characteristics are significant for the *imago Dei*, in that the physical abilities of sight, hearing, strength, etc. represent something of God and his activities, only in significantly lesser degree. This does not, however, imply that God is material or physical in any way. See Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 448-49.

⁵⁵Michael Spooner, “Rising above Our Language: Reflections on Our Metaphors for God,” *Priscilla Papers* 6, nos. 2-3 (1992): 11.

agreement, John Stackhouse posits, “If we are going to go beyond biblical images as we attempt to theologize in contemporary, nonpatriarchal terms, we must make sure that our alternatives maintain the best elements of the biblical system and do so in their appropriate relations.”⁵⁶ But how do egalitarians presume to offer new alternatives to a traditional, masculine understanding of God, and at the same time remain biblical? The way forward for egalitarians for a more “inclusive” understanding of God involves an ontological critique, a metaphorical critique, and a practical critique.

Ontology. Some egalitarians insist that God is neither male nor masculine, neither female nor feminine; God is not a gendered being.⁵⁷ Again, Scripture bears witness to the fact that God is not physically human in any way, male or female, as discussed above. Yet Scripture also speaks repeatedly of God and refers to God with masculine pronouns, names, etc. Never in the Bible is God referred to as “she” or “her,” but reference is always made to God as “he” and “him.” This fact is not inconsequential for theological reflection.

According to egalitarians, the primary reason why masculine language is used with reference to God is simply because of cultural adaptation. Alan Padgett insists, “With respect to God, yes, he is usually depicted as a male in Scripture. It does not follow from this that God is in fact masculine, since the naming of God reflects the language and culture in which the name (like any name) originated.”⁵⁸ Similarly, Tina Ostrander claims that the reason why God is not called “Mother” or referred to as “she” in

⁵⁶Stackhouse, *Finally Feminist*, 123.

⁵⁷Spooner, “Rising above Our Language,” 10.

⁵⁸Padgett, “Is God Masculine?” 18.

the Bible is “largely due to the Hebrew’s calling to separate themselves from their pagan neighbors.”⁵⁹ Thus, the masculine language, nomenclature, and designations of Scripture arise only as a result of the patriarchal society in which Israel found itself, in direct contrast to the polytheistic societies that contained male and female deities.

Nevertheless, alongside its masculine God-language, the Bible does use feminine imagery in description of God. Frances Hiebert rightly notes, “God is *described as warrior-deliverer, mother, father, wind, eagle, mother lion, and mother bear.*”⁶⁰

Virginia Mollenkott also mentions, among other examples, the Bible’s description of God as “mother hen” and Christ as “female pelican.”⁶¹ In light of feminine imagery such as this in the Bible, egalitarians are embracing with greater fervor the conclusion that it is appropriate to refer to God as “Mother,” even if the Bible itself does not provide this example or instruction to do so.⁶²

Marianne Meye Thompson rightly describes the contrast between complementarians and egalitarians on this point: “No traditionalist theologian argues that God is indeed male, although quite a few suggest that *masculine language better or*

⁵⁹Tina J. Ostrander, “Our Father Who Art In Heaven,” *Priscilla Papers* 13, no. 1 (1999): 5.

⁶⁰Frances F. Hiebert, “Imagery for God in the Old Testament,” *Priscilla Papers* 6, nos. 2-3 (1992): 13, emphasis mine.

⁶¹Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female* (New York: Crossroad, 1983). Mollenkott over-stretches her case, however, on the comparison of Christ as a “female pelican” from Ps 102:6. Certainly this is a messianic Psalm, but there is no warrant to conclude that God (or the psalmist) intended to imply a feminine nature for the Messiah. Further, her discussion builds primarily on aviary insights, not grammatical-historical exegesis.

⁶²See Stinson, “Religious Feminist Revisions of the God-World Relationship,” chap. 5. For example, see Paul R. Smith, *Is It Okay to Call God “Mother”? Considering the Feminine Face of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993).

exclusively mediates the biblical understanding of God."⁶³ Henry concurs, also offering a measured response to the importance of masculine language for God in Scripture:

But the Bible's predominant use of masculine imagery and metaphors is not to be hurriedly dismissed as a matter of indifference. Even as the biblical writers do not indiscriminately employ anthropomorphisms with reference to God, so the gender-uses of the inspired writers involve ontologically important conceptual distinctions, even though they do not convey sexual connotations. The biblical linguistic precedents are to be considered normative for Christian theology.⁶⁴

He continues,

The Bible clearly considers male imagery more appropriate than female imagery in respect to God's mighty works of creation, redemption and judgment. Something would be lost by cloaking such doctrines in feminine imagery, or in masculine-feminine imagery. Since the content of the biblical revelation is conveyed in the form of inspired propositional truths and words, the message and meaning of Scripture cannot be confidently formulated apart from due attention to its literary details.

But only in respect to Jesus of Nazareth do masculine pronouns applied to deity imply sexual distinctions, and that solely in view of his incarnation as God-man. It is as necessary to avoid extraneous inferences and to make sound inferences from gender distinctions and scriptural nomenclature as it is to relate other doctrines to the linguistic details of the Bible. Scripture's use of the terms 'Father' and 'Lord' of God bears an ontological importance beyond merely a description of deity as personal; the personal God is *Father* and *Lord*. This does not mean that he is assertedly [*sic*] like human males in some respect, as feminists often imply; rather, it affirms that God is in these respects intrinsically what creatures reflect only in secondary and often in imperfect ways. . . . The conclusion to be drawn is that the significance of biblical nomenclature is not to be projected from human analogy or philosophical conjecture but is to be derived rather from scriptural teaching and the meaning of literary details as they are illumined by the verbal and logical context.⁶⁵

⁶³Marianne Meye Thompson, *The Promise of the Father: Jesus and God in the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 178, emphasis mine. See also the very helpful article by Robert W. Jenson, "The Father, He . . .," in *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism*, ed. Alvin F. Kimel Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992): 95-109. The entire book is a relevant compendium of responses to feminist challenges of orthodox trinitarian theology.

⁶⁴Henry, *God Who Stands and Stays*, 5:160.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 162.

Henry argues that the linguistic details of Scripture, specifically the masculine designations for God, “involve ontologically important conceptual distinctions” that are “to be considered normative for Christian theology.” Why? Although God is not human (male or female), he has chosen to relate himself to the world as masculine.⁶⁶ In support of this claim Duncan Lowe states, “The distinct and emphatically male imagery which God uses of himself in Scripture is not to be discounted as mere cultural accommodation but is to be recognized as his free and deliberate self-revelation and therefore properly foundational in our thinking about him and our relationship to him.”⁶⁷

Thus, in contrast to egalitarian capitulation to feminist critiques, complementarians affirm strongly that “the names that God assigns *to himself* must be supremely important: his name affects how we think of who he is. Calling God ‘Mother’ is *changing God’s own description of himself in the Bible. It is calling God by a name that he has not taken for himself.* Therefore it is changing the way the Bible teaches us to think of God. It is thus changing our doctrine of God.”⁶⁸ At the very least, complementarians contend that even though God is not male (or female), he has revealed himself as “Father,” and this has important cognitive and theological significance for our understanding of who God is. Sadly and incorrectly, too many men conclude that this significance grounds their superiority over women on the basis of their masculinity.

⁶⁶Donald G. Bloesch, *The Battle for the Trinity* (Ann Arbor, MI: Vine, 1985), 33.

⁶⁷Duncan Lowe, quoted in Faith Martin, “Mystical Masculinity: The New Question Facing Women,” *Priscilla Papers* 6, no. 4 (1992): 3. Lowe’s statement came from an unpublished special report to the Atlantic Presbytery of the Reformed Presbyterian Church North America on March 4, 1989.

⁶⁸Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 232, emphasis original.

Metaphor. Given their commitment to the inspiration and authority of Scripture, most egalitarians correctly seek to retain the Fatherhood of God for evangelical theology. Faith Martin contends, however, that “even though God is truly our Father, we cannot move immediately from that fact to conclusions about God and masculinity. . . . The Scriptures are consistent, from beginning to end, in teaching that God is not our Father in any physical sense.”⁶⁹ So, to lessen the gender-related import of the masculine designation for God as “Father,” egalitarians prefer to interpret this referent as a metaphor.⁷⁰ Padgett says, “While I agree that the name of the triune God is ‘Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,’ to call God a father is to use a metaphor.”⁷¹

Padgett’s assertion actually obscures the very point he is trying to make. Is “Father” a name or a metaphor? Randall Stinson points out that this confusion between name and metaphor is a significant egalitarian methodological flaw:⁷² “There are approximately twenty-seven biblical references to God that utilize feminine imagery in some sense. Further, it is clear that when these images are used, they are most certainly

⁶⁹Martin, “Mystical Masculinity,” 1.

⁷⁰Hiebert, “Imagery for God in the Old Testament,” 13. Hiebert lists “father” alongside other metaphors for God, such as warrior, wind, etc. See also Aída Besançon Spencer, “Father-Ruler: The Meaning of the Metaphor ‘Father’ for God in the Bible,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39 (1996): 433-42. In contrast, see the excellent article by Garrett Green, “The Gender of God and the Theology of Metaphor,” in *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism*, ed. Alvin F. Kimel Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 44-64.

⁷¹Padgett, “Is God Masculine?” 19. Similarly, Sarah Sumner argues that “God is Father, not mother. But that doesn’t mean that God is male. Nor does it mean that God is masculine. *The metaphor is masculine*, but God is not.” Sumner, *Men and Women in the Church*, 121, emphasis mine. See her full discussion of “the authority of biblical metaphors”; *ibid.*, 113-22.

⁷²Stinson, “Religious Feminist Revisions of the God-World Relationship,” 152-57.

figures of speech: similes, metaphors, analogies, or personification. There are no cases in which feminine terms are used as names, titles, or invocations of God. There are no instances where God is directly identified by a feminine term.”⁷³ Further, John Cooper notes that “God is never directly said to be a mother, mistress, or female bird in the way he is said to be a father, king, judge, or shepherd.”⁷⁴ That is to say, the Bible never extends figures of speech (i.e., metaphors) into titles or appellatives. Likewise, Stinson concludes, it is improper to take a metaphor and make it a proper name, and it is improper to take a proper name and make it a metaphor.⁷⁵ The impropriety of egalitarian revisions in God-language involves collapsing names into metaphors and expanding metaphors into names or titles for God.

In contradistinction to egalitarian revisions, most complementarians insist that “Father” is a proper name for God and not merely a metaphor (e.g., Isa 63:16; Matt 6:8-9; 28:19; Eph 3:14-15), and note that the term “Father” points to an objective reality.⁷⁶ Bloesch contends, “We are not allowed to name or reimage God by drawing upon the myriad metaphors in the Bible and culture, for God names himself by revealing himself

⁷³Ibid., 152. In support of this claim, Stinson cites John W. Cooper, *Our Father in Heaven: Christian Faith and Inclusive Language for God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 65-91; and Roland Frye, “Language for God and Feminist Language: Problems and Principles,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 41 (1988): 36-43.

⁷⁴Cooper, *Our Father in Heaven*, 89.

⁷⁵Stinson, “Religious Feminist Revisions of the God-World Relationship,” 154-55.

⁷⁶For example, Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 230ff. Contra John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 55-58. Curiously, Robert Duncan Culver recognizes “Father” as a biblical name for God (with numerous scriptural references), yet concludes that it should be considered “more metaphorical” than literal. Robert Duncan Culver, *Systematic Theology* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2005), 56-57.

as Father, Son, and Spirit (cf. Matt 28:19). Our task is to acknowledge his name rather than to rename him in our image,⁷⁷ or according to cultural criticisms.

Practicality. While some egalitarians appeal to metaphorical language as a reason for devaluing and de-centering the masculine name “Father” in evangelical theological discourse, others offer another reason for de-emphasizing the primacy of masculine God-language, namely, masculine language in theology and liturgy actually prevents women from developing a relationship with God. So bemoans Melissa Kubitschek Luzzi: “How deplorable if Christ’s disciples’ insistent use of predominantly masculine language and leadership contributes to making a chasm between a woman and the most important thing in life—a right relationship with her God!”⁷⁸ It is hard to imagine, contrary to egalitarian claims, that God’s own specific revelation of himself in masculine terms actually inhibits those whom he made in his very image from properly understanding him and adequately responding to him. Yet, avers Michael Spooner, patriarchal (or masculine) language for God “tends to disenfranchise and alienate half the race,” spiritually speaking.⁷⁹

⁷⁷Donald G. Bloesch, *Jesus Christ: Savior and Lord* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 77.

⁷⁸Melissa Kubitschek Luzzi, “When Right Becomes Scriptural Abuse,” in *Healing the Hurting: Giving Hope and Help to Abused Women*, ed. Catherine Clark Kroeger and James R. Beck (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 57.

⁷⁹Spooner, “Rising above Our Language,” 11. Even worse, Jann Aldredge-Clanton argues, “Masculine God-language hinders many children from establishing relationships of trust with God. In addition, calling God ‘he’ causes boys to commit the sin of arrogance. . . . Calling the supreme power of the universe ‘he’ causes girls to commit the sin of devaluing themselves. For the sake of ‘these little ones’ we must change the way we talk about God and about human beings.” See Jann Aldredge-Clanton, *God, A Word for Boys and Girls* (Louisville: Glad River, 1993), 11.

Perhaps some women have horrible familial experiences with abusive biological fathers, step-fathers, adoptive or foster fathers—and as a result, they cannot easily relate to the predominant term for God as “Father.” For spiritual healing, Creegan and Pohl advise women with these experiences to consider the following: “The feminist journey often involves anguish and anger and requires deep healing. Sometimes the healing is facilitated by an enthusiastic embracing of the feminine dimensions of God, not because God is a woman, but because this image is important to a particular point in time.”⁸⁰ On the contrary, Bruce Ware has a more discerning perspective and better pastoral counsel:

Some who have been affected by abuse can learn afresh from our heavenly Father just what true fatherhood is. I have sometimes heard that those who grew up with abusive fathers simply need to remove from their minds the notion of God as Father. This name for God is a barrier to their relationship with him, some have said. But surely this is the wrong solution for a very real problem. Rather than removing “father” from our Christian vocabulary, and in particular from our naming of God, should we not work at having our minds and hearts refashioned so that our very conception of “father” is remade by knowing the true Father over all? That is, instead of encouraging a distancing from God as Father, with love and sensitivity we should say to those who cringe at memories of their fathers, “I’ve got wonderful news for you. There is a true Father who is drastically different in so many, many ways from the father you had. Meet, will you, the true God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Learn from him just what ‘father’ really means, and enter into the fullness of his fatherly love, care, wisdom, provision, protection, and security.”⁸¹

He concludes,

In other words, let’s relearn the paradigm of what “father” is from the Father in heaven. While this may involve a very long and difficult process, it is the only way to make true and genuine progress spiritually, since God has named himself as our Father, and this name is meant to convey rich and glorious spiritual benefit to us, his children. If some wicked and negligent human fathers robbed their children from being able to think of “father” positively and rightly, surely we should not add to

⁸⁰Creegan and Pohl, *Living on the Boundaries*, 160.

⁸¹Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 62.

this problem now by removing from them any hope of having the concept of “father” restored. . . . The pathway to recovery here, the only hope for genuine healing, will be through a deep and prolonged study of who God is, and through learning that this great and gracious God is none other than God our Father.⁸²

Conclusion. Are these related charges from egalitarians—that God is not male, that “Father” is a metaphor, and that patriarchal (or masculine) language in the Bible causes difficulties for women—sufficient to bring about a shift in evangelical theology for a more feminine emphasis in the doctrine of God? It seems that the cumulative case presented by egalitarians is not enough to persuade evangelicals to make a change. Why, then, do complementarians insist on retaining patriarchal language for theology?⁸³

Perhaps the underlying reason is *homoeroticism*, or the love of a male human for a male God.⁸⁴ Or is it the response of a hypermasculine theology, animated by insecurities about masculinity defined by wider culture?⁸⁵ No, there is something more conspicuous and morally upright at issue here. Complementarians contend that, coupled with the paucity of feminine imagery in Scripture, an acknowledgment of and commitment to divine self-revelation regarding the predominantly masculine referents for

⁸²Ibid., 62-63.

⁸³For an excellent, but abbreviated defense of this retention in evangelical Southern Baptist life, see Terry L. Wilder, “God—The Father,” *SBC Life* 16, no. 9 (2008): 10-11.

⁸⁴Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, “God’s Phallus and the Dilemmas of Masculinity,” in *Redeeming Men: Religion and Masculinities*, ed. Stephen B. Boyd, W. Merle Longwood, and Mark W. Muesse (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 36-37.

⁸⁵Mark W. Muesse, “Religious Machismo: Masculinity and Fundamentalism,” in *Redeeming Men: Religion and Masculinities*, ed. Stephen B. Boyd, W. Merle Longwood, and Mark W. Muesse (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 90-95.

God precludes any sufficient reason for egalitarian revisions in God-language. Thus, Christian theology must resist the broader feminist critiques and revisions of patriarchy, masculinity, and God-language if it desires to remain orthodox, and evangelical.⁸⁶

Revisions in the Doctrines of Bibliology and Ecclesiology

Egalitarian contributions to the doctrines of Scripture and the Church exhibit additional ways in which some evangelicals reflect affinity for feminist criticisms, ideology, and methodology. Given egalitarian doctrinal revisions elsewhere, revisions to bibliology and ecclesiology should come without surprise.⁸⁷

Scripture and hermeneutics. Most evangelical egalitarians claim to defend a traditional view of Scripture, arguing that the Bible is inspired, inerrant, and authoritative.⁸⁸ In fact, most (if not all) of the contributors to the egalitarian compendium *Discovering Biblical Equality* are active members of the Evangelical Theological Society.⁸⁹ Ligon Duncan points out, however, “We just don’t see many strongly

⁸⁶At the same time, evangelicals (especially complementarians) need to take seriously the problem that so many people think God *is* male, which leads some to the conclusion that males are more like God than females, and thus superior to them.

⁸⁷A comprehensive treatment of egalitarian revisions in these doctrines is beyond the scope and purpose of this chapter but certainly merit dissertation length examination in their own right. Nevertheless, only a limited representation of pertinent trends in egalitarian scholarship with respect to bibliology and ecclesiology will be provided.

⁸⁸Cf. Roger Nicole, “Biblical Egalitarianism and the Inerrancy of Scripture,” *Priscilla Papers* 20, no. 2 (2006): 4-9; and Dan Gentry Kent, “Can You Believe in Inerrancy and Equality?” *Priscilla Papers* 15, no. 1 (2001): 3-6. Of course, even those who reject inerrancy (on both sides of the gender issue) can affirm the Bible’s authority.

⁸⁹Membership requirement for ETS involves an affirmation of the doctrinal basis for the society specifically regarding the doctrines of Scripture and Trinity. The

inerrantist-egalitarians (meaning: those who hold unwaveringly to inerrancy and also to egalitarianism) in the younger generation of evangelicalism. Many if not most evangelical egalitarians today have significant qualms about inerrancy, and are embracing things like trajectory hermeneutics, etc. to justify their positions. Inerrancy or egalitarianism, one or the other, eventually wins out.”⁹⁰ Although many egalitarians would chafe at this insinuation, Duncan rightly points out that much of what is found in egalitarian literature highlights the difficulty of affirming egalitarianism and inerrancy.

Egalitarian revisions in God-language also support this assertion. When feminist criticisms overshadow the linguistic details of the biblical text—in this case, patriarchal language and masculine references to God—the inspired nature of the text becomes suspect for them, and consequently, so does inerrancy and authority.⁹¹ The overtly egalitarian attempt to produce and promulgate a “gender-neutral” translation of the Bible, such as *Today’s New International Version*, also challenges the inerrancy of Scripture—and verbal plenary inspiration as well (i.e., all the words of the Bible are

statement reads: “The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs. God is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory.”

⁹⁰Ligon Duncan, “Thanks Mark (more on T4G and Complementarianism)” [online]; accessed 28 July 2008; available from http://blog.togetherforthegospel.org/2006/06/thanks_mark.html; Internet.

⁹¹Inspiration means that “through the superintending influence of God’s Spirit on the writers of Holy Scripture, the account and interpretation of God’s revelation have been recorded as God intended so that the Bible is actually the Word of God. Inspiration preserved or recorded what God had revealed so that the resulting document carried the same authority and effect as if God Himself were speaking directly.” David S. Dockery, *The Doctrine of the Bible* (Nashville: Convention, 1997), 67. Further, this inspiration extends beyond the direction of thoughts to the selection of words in order to communicate precisely what God wanted to reveal. *Ibid.*, 75. So, to overturn gendered language in the Bible is a direct assault on the inspiration of Scripture, and ultimately, on its truthfulness and authority.

God's words).⁹² If the Bible is *just* what God wanted, *all* that he wanted, and *only* what he wanted,⁹³ then there is no justifiable warrant to revise biblical God-language and change specific terminology in Bible translation, despite feminist criticisms and pressures.

At some points, egalitarians appear to be concerned not with what the Bible says (and how it says it) but what it intends to say and where it is heading. Such is the sentiment expressed through a "trajectory hermeneutic" or a "redemptive-movement hermeneutic."⁹⁴ Proponents of this hermeneutic argue that the New Testament contains "seed" ideas regarding women's participation in ministry leadership.⁹⁵ For example, R. T. France claims to uncover "a trajectory of thought and practice developing through Scripture, and arguably pointing beyond itself to the fuller outworking of God's ultimate

⁹²On this point see Vern S. Poythress and Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy: Muting the Masculinity of God's Words* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000). Consider also D. A. Carson, *The Inclusive Language Debate: A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998). There are also a number of critical articles related to the TNIV in the *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 7/2 (2002). The TNIV is also the translation of choice, not surprisingly, of Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE).

⁹³This phrase comes from my late collegiate Bible professor, Dr. James L. Travis.

⁹⁴This position is defined and defended in David L. Thompson, "Women, Men, Slaves, and the Bible: Hermeneutical Inquiries," *Christian Scholar's Review* 25 (1996): 326-49; William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001); and John G. Stackhouse Jr., *Finally Feminist: A Pragmatic Christian Understanding of Gender* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005). Consider also Krister Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of Women: A Case Study in Hermeneutics*, trans. Emilei T. Sander (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966); and Richard Longenecker, *New Testament Social Ethics for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).

⁹⁵R. T. France, *Women in the Church's Ministry: A Test Case for Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 78.

purpose in Christ in ways which the first-century situation did not yet allow.”⁹⁶ William Webb also typifies this interpretative view, positing a developmental hermeneutic for Scripture using “the X → Y → Z Principle.”⁹⁷ This principle signifies Webb’s hermeneutical model, suggesting that the Bible is progressing away from its “original culture” (which is patriarchal) to the “ultimate ethic” of egalitarianism.⁹⁸ Webb’s purpose is to ascertain the “spirit” of the text, as opposed to a static reading of the text as it is.

In response, the trajectory or redemptive-movement hermeneutic does not represent a traditional evangelical view of the Bible or its proper interpretation.⁹⁹ Several considerations demonstrate this judgment. First, a trajectory hermeneutic closely resembles (and possibly extends) the Catholic interpretive idea *sensus plenior*. Catholic scholar Raymond Brown describes *sensus plenior* as “that additional deeper meaning, intended by God but not clearly intended by the human author, which is seen to exist in the words of a biblical text (or group of texts, or even a whole book) when they are studied in the light of further revelation or development in the understanding of revelation.”¹⁰⁰ Evangelical scholar Douglas Moo, in contrast, resists the *sensus plenior*,

⁹⁶Ibid., 91.

⁹⁷Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals*, 30-66.

⁹⁸Interestingly, Webb’s terminology for the ultimate ethic is “ultra-soft patriarchy or complementary egalitarianism.” His retention of the term patriarchy is not meant to convey male headship or male leadership in any way contrary to egalitarianism, but only to offer men a “symbolic honor.” Ibid., 243.

⁹⁹For response to this interpretive perspective, see Thomas R. Schreiner, “William J. Webb’s *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals*: A Review Article,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 6, no. 1 (2002): 46-64. Note also Wayne Grudem’s response to this perspective in *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 345-57.

¹⁰⁰Raymond E. Brown, *The ‘Sensus Plenior’ of Sacred Scripture* (Baltimore: St. Mary’s University, 1955), 92. Some evangelicals defend *sensus plenior* as well, see

arguing not for “new” or “deeper” interpretations (specifically of the Old Testament in the New Testament), but rather the proper recognition and interpretation of promise/fulfillment and typology, approached canonically.¹⁰¹

Second, for most evangelicals, hermeneutics is controlled by a commitment to grammatical-historical exegesis and authorial intent,¹⁰² in contrast to the *sensus plenior* understanding mentioned previously. A trajectory hermeneutic, however, betrays this commitment by intentionally seeking another, extended meaning beyond the given words and meaning of the biblical author, at least in context. For proponents of the trajectory view, a grammatical-historical interpretation of the Bible is too static and only serves to perpetuate readings of the text that support slavery and women’s subordination. Grudem rightly notes the immediate problem: a trajectory hermeneutic invalidates the Bible as our final source of authority, since the teachings of the New Testament authors are eclipsed by “our own ideas of the direction the New Testament was heading but never quite

D. A. Oss, “Canon as Context: The Function of *Sensus Plenior* in Evangelical Hermeneutics,” *Grace Theological Journal* 7 (1986): 105-27. To be more accurate, unlike the *sensus plenior* view, the trajectory approach does not claim that the *telos* at which the trajectory aims is the *meaning* of the text, but that it is the horizon toward which the church travels as launched on by the so-called “trajectory” of Scripture. Nevertheless, in this approach, a text’s meaning is explained by the trajectory in view.

¹⁰¹Douglas J. Moo, “The Problem of Sensus Plenior,” in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 179-211.

¹⁰²See the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics*, especially articles 7 and 8. This statement can be found in appendix 2 of J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken: Revelation and the Bible*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 151-58. See also J. I. Packer, “Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics,” in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 325-56; cf. William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word, 1993); and Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

reached.”¹⁰³ By extension, then, a trajectory hermeneutic denies the principle of *sola Scriptura*, or the Bible alone as the final source of authority.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, an egalitarian interpretation of the Bible in terms of a trajectory hermeneutic proves a significant revision in an evangelical doctrine of Scripture.

Ecclesiology. Women’s full participation in the leadership and ministry of the church is the most prominent and obvious issue in the gender debate,¹⁰⁵ so a brief introduction is offered here. The literature is profuse from evangelical biblical scholars and theologians on both sides of this issue.¹⁰⁶ Interestingly, the most recent resource catalog (2008) from Christians for Biblical Equality contains more works attributed to women in Christian ministry than any other topic—a telling sign of this issue’s protuberance among egalitarians.

Non-evangelical feminists have called not only for the tacit acceptance of women in pastoral or priestly ministry but also for the nature of the church to embody the characteristics of “women-church” or the “discipleship of equals” comprised of liberated women and women-identified men.¹⁰⁷ Although less pretentious than Schüssler

¹⁰³Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 346.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 346-47.

¹⁰⁵But women in ministry is not the most important issue in the gender debate. The actual way women are treated and regarded is the more fundamental issue. I am indebted to Sarah Sumner for this insight.

¹⁰⁶See the helpful, introductory work of James R. Beck and Craig L. Blomberg, eds., *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001). Compare also these contrasting perspectives in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* and *Discovering Biblical Equality*.

¹⁰⁷Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals* (New York: Crossroad, 1993).

Fiorenza's proposal, evangelical egalitarians nonetheless desire the results of her critique for every facet of the contemporary church.¹⁰⁸ For example, Bilezikian's "new community" envisions all-encompassing changes in the church to fulfill the radical male-female integration inaugurated by Jesus and his disciples.¹⁰⁹ But egalitarians seem to desire more than just male-female integration in the church. Grudem contends, "The egalitarian agenda will not stop simply with the rejection of male headship in marriage and the establishment of women as pastors and elders in churches. There is something much deeper at stake. At the foundation of egalitarianism is a dislike and a rejection of anything uniquely masculine. It is a dislike of manhood itself."¹¹⁰ This trend is what Leon Podles describes in his incisive discourse on the ever-increasing feminization of the church.¹¹¹ Certainly, Podles's thesis is reflected in egalitarian revisions in evangelical

¹⁰⁸Cf. Mimi Haddad and Alvera Mickelsen, "Helping the Church Understand Biblical Equality," in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 481-93; and Creegan and Pohl, *Living on the Boundaries*, chap. 5.

¹⁰⁹Cf. Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles*, 89-158. Bilezikian does not credit Schüssler Fiorenza for his discussion or conclusions. It is hard to avoid, however, the similarities between Bilezikian's "new community" and Schüssler Fiorenza's "discipleship of equals," even though there is no direct link. For the purpose of my argument, I am simply saying that many egalitarians want what Schüssler Fiorenza wants when it comes to the life and identity of the church—complete egalitarianism in every facet.

¹¹⁰Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism?* 223. See also the discussion of Daniel R. Heimbach, "The Unchangeable Difference: Eternally Fixed Sexual Identity for an Age of Plastic Sexuality," in *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 275-89. Like Oliver Crisp, Heimbach argues for the essential nature of genderedness with respect to human identity, which would include both femininity and masculinity.

¹¹¹Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent: The Feminization of Christianity* (Dallas: Spence, 1999). While I think Podles' thesis is sound, and noteworthy, I do not agree with or endorse everything he suggests.

theology. As depicted previously, egalitarians are increasingly rejecting anything patriarchal or uniquely masculine, from biblical God-language to male headship in the ministry leadership of the church. Undoubtedly, feminist criticisms provide the impetus behind these egalitarian revisions. They are also responsible for emerging Christological changes.

Emerging Evangelical Revisions in Christology

Evangelical affinity for feminist critiques and proposals do not stop at the doctrines of God, Scripture, and ecclesiology. On the contrary, feminist criticisms are influencing evangelicals regarding Christology, with respect to both the person and work of Christ. Emerging evangelical revisions in Christology are evident in two overarching areas: first, a resistance to the necessity and particularity of the maleness of Jesus, and second, a rejection of penal substitutionary atonement in favor of less “violent” approaches to the cross. Arguably, these developments in Christology represent departures from a standard, traditional position among evangelical theologians.

Evangelicals have produced an impressive panoply of works dedicated to Christ’s person and work.¹¹² Indicative of evangelical Christology is a commitment to the

¹¹²As a representative sample, see John H. Armstrong, ed., *The Glory of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002); Bloesch, *Jesus Christ*; Darrell L. Bock, *Jesus According to Scripture: Restoring the Portrait from the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002); F. F. Bruce, *Jesus, Lord and Savior* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986); Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991); Gordon D. Fee, *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007); Simon J. Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); Donald Guthrie, *Jesus the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972); Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992); Carl F. H. Henry, ed., *Jesus of Nazareth: Saviour and Lord* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966); idem, *The Identity of Jesus of Nazareth* (Nashville: Broadman, 1992); Charles E. Hill and Frank A.

inspiration and authority of Scripture, which alone provides the sufficient portrait and data of Jesus Christ for Christological formulation.¹¹³ In contrast to feminist theological methodology, evangelical Christology is a biblical-textual endeavor, seeking to do Christology “from above” or beginning from divine revelation, as opposed to Christology “from below” beginning with historical-critical methodology and the prioritization of human experience.¹¹⁴

Evangelical theologian David Wells rightly contends, “The shape which our Christology assumes is determined by the presuppositions and operating assumptions with which we start.”¹¹⁵ As mentioned in chapter 2, feminist theological methodology

James III, eds., *The Glory of the Atonement* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004); Michael S. Horton, *Lord and Servant: A Covenant Christology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005); Steve Jeffrey, Mike Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity, 2007); Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993); Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998); I. Howard Marshall, *Jesus the Saviour: Studies in New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990); Leon Morris, *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1983); Robert L. Reymond, *Jesus, Divine Messiah* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2003); Harold H. Rowdon, *Christ the Lord* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1982); Robert H. Stein, *Jesus the Messiah* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996); John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986); idem, *The Incomparable Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001); David F. Wells, *The Person of Christ* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1984); Ben Witherington III, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); and idem, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997).

¹¹³On this assertion, see Richard Reid, “The Necessity of a Biblical Christology,” in *Who Do You Say That I Am? Christology and the Church*, ed. Donald Armstrong (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 25-45.

¹¹⁴See Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 679-91.

¹¹⁵Wells, *The Person of Christ*, 21. See also Christopher D. Hancock, “The Christological Problem,” in *Who Do You Say That I Am? Christology and the Church*, ed. Donald Armstrong (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 6.

begins from below, approaching theological formulation (including Christology) through the grid of human experience. Thus, feminist criticisms of traditional Christology and their constructive proposals and alternatives deviate from evangelical Christological commitments because of different presuppositions and operating assumptions in the task of theology. In light of this, Donald Bloesch complains that the “ideological movement of feminism is having a resounding impact on christology. When gender-inclusive language is mandated for the persons of the Godhead and even for Jesus Christ, a theological shift of major proportions is taking place.”¹¹⁶

Among evangelicals, egalitarians are much more receptive of this theological shift than complementarians, as demonstrated in their embrace of feminist critiques regarding patriarchy, God-language, and church order. Mary Kassian notes that this embrace is not a new phenomenon: “Conservative evangelical Christians began to incorporate a feminist perspective into their theology in the early to mid-1970s, approximately fifteen years after the mainline denominations did.”¹¹⁷ Yet, she contends, if egalitarian evangelicals continue to absorb feminist thought into their theological formulation, the path is wide that leads to liberalism, affecting generations to come by compromising essential Christian doctrines.¹¹⁸ At present, revisions of traditional, orthodox Christian teaching unwittingly find entrance into evangelical thought through the susceptibility of the egalitarian position. As Kassian notes, even though “the evangelical church has witnessed popularization of the ordination of women, inclusive

¹¹⁶Bloesch, *Jesus Christ*, 75.

¹¹⁷Mary Kassian, *The Feminist Mistake* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 248.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, 276-77.

language, and most recently challenges and changes to historic Trinitarian doctrine,”¹¹⁹ for the majority of evangelical feminists, there is no *direct* “challenge [to] theological doctrines such as sin and redemption.”¹²⁰ Nonetheless, when feminist ideology is adopted by egalitarian evangelicals to make revisions in the doctrines mentioned earlier, there will consequently be challenges to other corollary doctrines, especially Christology.¹²¹

Growing Resistance to the Particularity and Necessity of Christ’s Maleness

Faith Martin, a founding board member of Christians for Biblical Equality, recalls an incident in a children’s Sunday School class that provides a helpful entrance into the discussion of an egalitarian resistance to the particularity of Jesus’ maleness. She writes,

As [the class] was preparing to act out the day’s Bible story, there was general good-natured confusion while the children claimed their favorite character. The roles were awarded without regard to sex since the characters in this story were all men and the class was evenly divided between boys and girls. So when Jesus was announced it was no surprise when a girl asked to play his part. Immediately a boy called out, “You can’t be Jesus—you’re a GIRL!” Before the teachers could intervene the girl shot back, “A girl can be Jesus, a girl can be Jesus!” She wasn’t exactly crying but her rising voice managed to convey such emotion that the noisy room fell silent and all eyes focused on her.

This little girl and her adversary are not fictional characters dreamed up for illustration, but real children who for one moment crystallize a profound theological debate going on in the church. Consider for one moment: If you had been the teacher, would you have had any hesitation in awarding the role of Jesus to that little girl?¹²²

¹¹⁹Ibid., 287.

¹²⁰Ibid., 259.

¹²¹Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 535.

¹²²Martin, “Mystical Masculinity,” 7.

How one answers Martin's probing question is not theologically inconsequential. While the illustration is intended to provoke an emotional response, Martin's intention is to conclude, implicitly, that "a girl can be Jesus." Unfortunately, Martin is right: the gender of Jesus is "a profound theological debate going on in the church," and it is so as a direct result of feminist ideology and critiques of traditional Christian doctrines. As a result, evangelicals who resonate with feminist views are now also raising questions about the gender of Jesus. Consequently, egalitarians who resist the necessity or particularity of the maleness of Jesus typically fall within three perspectives.

First, some argue that Christ's maleness poses detrimental problems for women. Elaine Storkey notes, "The weight put on Christ's maleness has forged much theology and ecclesiology to the detriment of women. Yet now another question emerges. If maleness is seen as essential to Christ in his humanity, how is it not non-essential to Christ in his divinity?" She continues, "Christ as God incarnate is God as male incarnate. And exclusion from redemption has to leave women with fundamental problems with regard to the Christian faith."¹²³ Has Storkey embraced feminist theological criticisms, especially regarding Christology? So it seems. Her phraseology itself reflects one of the most famous phrases in feminist theology; namely, Mary Daly's "if God is male, then male is God."¹²⁴ Moreover, the weight of Storkey's argument arises from the basic feminist approach to Christology, summarized by Rosemary Ruether:

¹²³Elaine Storkey, "Who Is the Christ? Issues in Christology and Feminist Theology," in *Gospel and Gender*, ed. Douglas A. Campbell (New York: T & T Clark, 2003), 108.

¹²⁴Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1973), 19.

“Christology has been the doctrine of the Christian tradition that has been most frequently used against women.”¹²⁵

For Storkey and other egalitarians, to argue for the necessity of Christ’s maleness implies that one must conclude also that God is male, because Jesus *is* God. Rebecca Merrill Groothuis claims that if God is considered masculine, then it “also follows that the maleness of Christ is theologically necessary. An essential masculine God must be incarnated as a male; he must have the physical sexual nature that reflects and corresponds to his metaphysical sexual nature.”¹²⁶ The theological quandary is this: on the one hand, if God is masculine, then by necessity Jesus must also be masculine; on the other hand, if Jesus is God incarnate in a man’s body, then the implication is that God is also masculine because he chose to en flesh himself with the male gender. Therefore, Storkey and Groothuis seek to avoid this problem and simply conclude that the necessity of a male Christ must be rejected, because it not only points to the problem of a male God but also yields theological difficulties for women.

Second, some resist the necessity of Christ’s maleness on the grounds that God was simply accommodating to patriarchal culture, which makes a male Messiah the pragmatic and logical, but not necessary, choice. Brynn Camery-Haggott argues, “God’s decision to send a son instead of a daughter was a practical one.”¹²⁷ That is, the

¹²⁵Rosemary Radford Ruether, *To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 45.

¹²⁶Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, “Logical and Theological Problems with Gender Hierararchy,” *Priscilla Papers* 14, no. 2 (2000): 4.

¹²⁷Brynn Camery-Haggott, “A Man For All People: The Importance of Jesus’ Masculinity,” *Mutuality* 13/1 (2006): 11. *Mutuality* is a quarterly periodical by Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE).

patriarchal context of the biblical world determined that the Messiah would be a man, otherwise Jesus would not have had a voice in the society of his day. She continues, “If Jesus had come as a woman, a Gentile, a leper, or any other group segregated from the Jews during that time, He would have been quickly dismissed and the message would have been lost.”¹²⁸ Thus, Jesus came as he did—particularly a Jewish male—simply and only because the cultural factors of the era.

Some egalitarians further argue that Christian theology must not preclude the notion that the Christ *could have* come differently. Mimi Haddad, current president of Christians for Biblical Equality, links the gender of Jesus to societal factors. She queries, “[W]hat if God decided to send Messiah to a matriarchal culture? Would then our Messiah come as a female?”¹²⁹ In concert with egalitarian criticisms of patriarchy, she concludes that the Fall ushered into human society the bane of patriarchy, and as a result, God sent the Messiah as a man.

Although affirming that Jesus was a man historically, Paul Smith decries, “Something is wrong when we cannot conceive of the Messiah coming from a different cultural setting or being of a different race or gender.”¹³⁰ But Smith’s conception of a different Christ is only a small step from a more radical egalitarianism. Asian feminist theologian Kwok Pui-Lan insists, “if we cannot imagine Jesus as a tree, as a river, as wind, and as rain, we are doomed together; if we are ever anthropocentric in our search

¹²⁸Ibid., emphasis mine.

¹²⁹Mimi Haddad, quoted by Bruce A. Ware, “Could Our Savior Have Been a Woman?” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 8, no. 1 (2003): 33. Haddad is the current president of Christians for Biblical Equality. Her comments were made at the Soularize Conference in 2002.

¹³⁰Smith, *Is It Okay to Call God “Mother”?* 1.

[for the Christ] we are doomed.”¹³¹ Certainly, egalitarians evangelicals do not embrace the pantheistic egalitarianism represented by radical feminists like Pui-Lan, because evangelicals are committed to the *biblical* presentation of messianic expectation. Nevertheless, a growing number of egalitarians do not consider gender essential to Jesus’ person and mission, but only as God’s anthropological adjustment to the rampant patriarchalism of Jesus’ day.

A third perspective among egalitarians to resist the necessity of Jesus’ gender is merely to downplay maleness in favor of Jesus taking on “generic” humanness. Stanley Grenz articulates this view, claiming that Jesus’ *humanity* was important for his incarnation, not his maleness.¹³² Grace Ying May and Hyunhye Pokrifka Joe concur, asserting that even though Jesus was born as a male child, the Scriptures “do not celebrate his gender as an intrinsic or eternal quality of Christ.” The problem, for May and Joe, concerns whether or not the incarnation of a male God can represent or redeem women.

¹³¹Kwok Pui-Lan, quoted in Storkey, “Who Is the Christ?” 113. Pui-Lan’s comments were made at the now infamous Re-Imagining Conference in 1993.

¹³²Stanley Grenz, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 207-09. Cf. Stanley J. Grenz, *Created for Community*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 116-23. Grenz seems to straddle multiple positions in his writings, making him difficult to categorize. In another work, for example, Grenz contends that the maleness of Jesus is indispensable to his messianic mission, yet downplays his gender by insisting that his maleness is significant only because of the patriarchal context into which he was born. Grenz is content to label Jesus the “paradigmatic” or “new human.” See Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, new ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), chap. 10. It is interesting to note, however, that medieval Christian reflection on the humanity of Jesus specifically magnified Jesus’ gender. At least in terms of a wide range of medieval art, the emphasis on Jesus’ penis is part of what expresses and exemplifies his humanness. See Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and Modern Oblivion* (New York: Pantheon, 1983).

Thus, Jesus' maleness must be minimized and his generic humanity emphasized, if the whole human race is to be represented through him.¹³³

Evaluation and response. Because a more complete defense of the necessity of Jesus' maleness was presented in chapter 3, only an abbreviated response these three egalitarian positions will be offered here. First, the allegation that retaining the necessity of Jesus' maleness harms or hinders women simply does not hold. On the contrary, the *man* Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and humanity, who gave himself as a ransom for all (1 Tim 2:5-6). Jesus tasted death for everyone (Heb 2:9), in order that in him all people—Jews, Gentiles, males, or females—might become Abraham's offspring and heirs according to the promises God made to him (Gal 3:28-29). Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world, so that anyone who comes to him in faith might receive eternal life (John 3:15-36), and God does not discriminate between people on the basis of demographic factors (Acts 10:34-35).

As argued previously, the maleness of Jesus is a theological necessity, if Christian theology seeks to submit itself to the inspired Word of God, thus accepting the unfolding drama of redemption in all its resplendent beauty as all things find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Moreover, the categories, types, and nomenclature of the biblical narrative underscore the particularity of Jesus. That is, as Bruce Ware articulates, "For reasons ranging from the nature of the Trinity itself, to his role as the second Adam, the seed of Abraham, the Son of David, the Son of Man, and the Son of God, Jesus

¹³³Grace Ying May and Hyunhye Pokrifka Joe, "Setting the Record Straight: A Response to J. I. Packer's Position on Women's Ordination," *Priscilla Papers* 11, no. 1 (1997): 5-6.

simply had to be a man.”¹³⁴ Therefore, far from being detrimental to women, the necessity of a male Messiah actually secures the promises of salvation and offers good news for all, including women.

Second, the notion that Christ’s gender was simply a pragmatic cultural accommodation on the part of God fails as an objection to the necessity of Jesus’ maleness. At first glance, this position seems convincing, provided there is an acceptance that the biblical world was, in fact, patriarchal. The problem with this view, however, is two-fold: (1) this view assumes that patriarchy is sinful and resultant of the Fall, and (2) this view does not account for the continued emphasis on the necessity of Jesus’ maleness in the eschaton. The egalitarian rejection of patriarchy was addressed earlier in this chapter, but the issue of Jesus’ gender in the eschaton deserves explanation.

Paul Smith strangely admits, “I personally try to avoid using masculine pronouns for the risen, transcendent Christ except when I am speaking of him during his time here on earth before his ascension.”¹³⁵ This practice not only demonstrates Smith’s capitulation to feminist ideology but also reveals a shallow scriptural understanding and a theologically inaccurate comprehension of biblical eschatology. Most definitely, Jack Cottrell answers the question of cultural accommodation by showing the eschatological import of Jesus’ maleness:

The Messiah’s maleness was a factor not just during the course of his earthly ministry; it continues to be prominent even now in his heavenly ministry toward us who are his people. He is the bridegroom to whom we are betrothed (2 Cor 11:2). He is the “Son over His house whose house we are” (Heb 3:6). As the Son and heir

¹³⁴Ware, “Could Our Savior Have Been a Woman?” 38. Ware’s point with reference to the necessity of Jesus’ maleness reasoned from the nature of the Trinity is described in chap.3, pp. 93-95.

¹³⁵Smith, *Is It Okay to Call God “Mother”?* 143.

he shares his inheritance with us (Rom 8:17). His ministry as our “great high priest” continues uninterruptedly in heaven for us (Heb 4:14-16). He reigns from heaven even now as “King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Tim 6:17). *Every role in which Christ relates to us now is a male role.*

In the eschaton his maleness will be magnified. To his people he will come as the bridegroom to receive us as his bride (Rev 19:7; 21:2, 9). To those who oppose him he will come as a triumphant and destroying warrior under the name “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS” (Rev 19:11-16). In the final judgment God “will judge the world in righteousness through a Man [ἄνθρωπος] whom He has appointed.” (Acts 17:31)

Cottrell rightly concludes,

The Bible’s overwhelming emphasis on the maleness of Christ, as it assigns to him exclusively male titles and roles, shows unequivocally that it was God’s intentional plan to redeem the world not just through a human being but through a human being who is male. It shows that the Messiah’s maleness is not arbitrary or accidental. That he continues to relate to us in male roles shows that his gender was not just a cultural accommodation.¹³⁶

Finally, the view that Jesus’ maleness must be downplayed in favor of his taking a “generic” human nature is also judged to be inadequate. Although articulated previously in chapter 3, the case must be made that while all humans share essential properties,¹³⁷ human nature is not (and cannot be) without gender. Oliver Crisp convincingly defends this assertion, claiming that “human nature is not fundamentally a property, but a concrete particular composed of a human body and a distinct soul.”¹³⁸ If Crisp is correct, then human nature includes the body, which is gendered. As such, for

¹³⁶Jack Cottrell, “The Gender of Jesus and the Incarnation: A Case Study in Feminist Hermeneutics,” 10, emphasis mine [on-line]; accessed 11 April 2006; available from http://www.cbmw.org/images/articles_pdf/cottrell_jack/genderofjesus.pdf; Internet.

¹³⁷Cf. Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1986), chap. 3.

¹³⁸Oliver D. Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity: The Incarnation Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 71. Crisp’s statement arises from his discussion of the human nature of the incarnate Son of God, particularly with reference to the distinction between abstract- and concrete-human natures.

Jesus to take upon human nature means that he must also assume a gendered body, not a generic, androgynous, or quasi-human nature devoid of sexual characteristics. Therefore, the eternal Son of God did not become generic humanity, but became a particular historical individual male, Jesus of Nazareth.¹³⁹

Growing Rejection of Penal Substitutionary Atonement

Feminist theologians insist that the traditional theories of the atonement present God and salvation in terms exceedingly violent and troubling to modern sensibilities. The cross is castigated as “divine child abuse”—the glorification of bloodshed, death, and the execution of wrath and judgment from God the Father upon his innocent Son, Jesus. Egalitarian evangelicals are steadily embracing this feminist critique and employing its theological pungency in order to influence evangelical theology away from its traditional acceptance and prioritization of penal substitution. Even though the feminist critique of a traditional doctrine of the atonement may seem far-fetched to many evangelicals, feminist criticisms are much more appealing for contemporary theology than many recognize.

Consider the rising receptivity to the concerns of feminists among evangelical theologians. Hans Boersma opines, “The issue of the relationship between atonement and violence has hardly been discussed at all within the evangelical orbit. It is nonetheless an issue that we need to come to grips with, if we don’t want the traditional models of the atonement simply to be written off as accommodating violence and abuse.”¹⁴⁰ Tyron Inbody, in view of feminist critiques, states, “The problem for Christian theology today is

¹³⁹Bloesch, *Jesus Christ*, 76.

¹⁴⁰Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 195.

whether this interpretation [i.e., penal substitution] of the cross is an answer to or an exacerbation of the problem of sin and suffering. The New Testament metaphor of sacrifice and the atonement theories that have grown from it have come under criticism today as archaic, bizarre, offensive to human sensibilities, immoral, an ideology of repression, and even a sacralization of abuse.”¹⁴¹ Rebecca Pentz contends that “a uniquely feminine experience gives real insight into what happened on the cross.”¹⁴² Yet whose experience yields important insights for evangelical Christology—that of Ruether, Brock, Carlson Brown and Parker, or Irigaray? The proposals of these feminists, however, are contrary to evangelical Christianity, neither supportive nor beneficial.

Although most egalitarians do not wish to overthrow centuries of belief and acceptance of traditional conceptions of the atonement, some desire to alter or redefine its theological interior away from penal substitution. With feminist criticisms apparently in view, Carolyn Holderread Heggen suggests mildly, “Let us hold up the crucifixion, not as a symbol of the virtue of suffering, but as the result of Jesus’ consistent challenges against the dominating, violent powers of evil. Let’s point to the cross, not as proof that all suffering is redemptive, but rather as evidence that Jesus, because of his wounds, stands in compassionate solidarity with all those who suffer.”¹⁴³ Likewise, evangelical feminists Creegan and Pohl reject penal substitution, convinced that “loosening the

¹⁴¹Tyron L. Inbody, *The Many Faces of Christology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 142.

¹⁴²Rebecca Pentz, “Is There a Biblical Feminism?” *Priscilla Papers* 3, no. 4 (1989): 5.

¹⁴³Carolyn Holderread Heggen, “Religious Beliefs and Abuse,” in *Women, Abuse, and the Bible: How Scripture Can Be Used to Hurt or Heal*, ed. Catherine Clark Kroeger and James R. Beck (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 24.

connection between penal atonement theory and evangelical faith can deepen and strengthen our Christology.”¹⁴⁴ They desire to perceive atonement in terms of Christ’s suffering solidarity with us, apart from any sense in which Jesus must satisfy or absolve extra imposed penalties from God.¹⁴⁵ Creegan and Pohl recognize the central role penal substitution has occupied in evangelical atonement theology, yet to them the penal theory evokes negative images of God as angry, intent on wrath and destruction, and unnecessarily cruel. Further, this theory only exacerbates “the difficulty of appropriating God’s grace” for those who have been abused or lived under angry authoritarian figures.¹⁴⁶ So, they claim, penal substitution must be cast aside.

Accepting the feminist criticism that traditional atonement theories are themselves abusive and perpetuate abuse lead many egalitarians to avoid or reject classical atonement theories, especially penal substitution. While some evangelicals oppose penal substitution for other reasons,¹⁴⁷ many who resist or reject penal substitution

¹⁴⁴Creegan and Pohl, *Living on the Boundaries*, 157.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., 156. See also Mark S. Medley, “Emancipatory Solidarity: The Redemptive Significance of Jesus in Mark,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 21, no. 1 (1994): 5-22. Medley received his Ph.D. from Southern Seminary in 1995. Undoubtedly, he drank deeply from the theological wells of Molly Marshall and Frank Tupper, clearly evident in his penchant for feminist criticisms of traditional Christian doctrine. Medley relies heavily on feminist sources throughout his article.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., 155.

¹⁴⁷Clark Pinnock opposes penal substitution on the grounds that the language is “too crude,” in *Theological Crossfire* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 149. Pinnock also rejects penal substitution as a result of his commitment to Arminianism and Open Theism. See Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God’s Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992). Greg Boyd also opposes penal substitution on similar grounds, but also because he favors the Christus Victor motif as the all-encompassing metaphor for atonement. See Gregory A. Boyd, “Christus Victor View,” in *The Nature of the Atonement*, ed. James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 23-49; and idem, *God At War: The Bible and Spiritual*

have feminist criticisms specifically in mind. Virginia Mollenkott exclaims, “I can no longer worship in a theological context that depicts God as an abusive parent and Jesus as the obedient trusting child. This violent theology encourages the violence of our streets and our nations.”¹⁴⁸ Mollenkott obviously believes the feminist insinuation that the cross is divine child abuse, which grounds all other forms of violence and abuse.

Perhaps the most forthright evangelical opposition to penal substitutionary theory comes from Mark Green and Joel Baker’s *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*. A brief excerpt is sufficient to represent the whole tenor of their thesis:

What are we to make of these criticisms [from feminists]? First, it must be acknowledged that legitimate concerns lie behind these objections. However we might want to urge . . . that atonement theology, either biblically or classically understood, is misappropriated and misrepresented when coerced into the popular mold of the model of penal substitution, the fact remains that study groups, songs, and other manifestations of popular church life in America often represent this model as nothing less than *the* historical teaching of the Christian church. As such, when criticisms of this view are raised, we can do nothing less than admit straightforwardly that, on biblical and traditional grounds, this contemporary manifestation of atonement theology is both deficient and disturbing. That atonement theology might be placed in the service of abusive behavior, and indeed serve to provide the divine imprimatur for that behavior, is a scandal that calls for repentance and repudiation.¹⁴⁹

The apparent intention of Green and Baker in their book is an “all-out assault on the doctrine of penal substitution,” based upon “a whole stream of contemporary non-

Conflict (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), chap. 9.

¹⁴⁸Virginia Mollenkott, quoted in Susan Cyre, “Mainline Denial: How Our Churches are Responding to ‘Re-Imagining’,” *Good News* 27, no. 5 (1994): 12-13. In personal response to my dissertation, Sarah Sumner strongly emphasized that Mollenkott is not an evangelical, but a radical feminist. Mollenkott was, however, evangelical and wrote as such, even though now she may have rejected evangelicalism completely.

¹⁴⁹Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 92. See also the subsequent companion volume, *Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross: Contemporary Images of the Atonement*, ed. Mark D. Baker (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006).

evangelical thought on the atonement,” namely, feminism.¹⁵⁰ Their work is indicative of the assimilation of feminist critiques of the atonement within evangelical theology.

Interestingly, Joel Green insists that we should promote and blend *all* theories of the atonement together, except of course, penal substitution.¹⁵¹

In conjunction with the rejection of traditional atonement theories (especially penal substitution), some evangelicals are revising the notion of atonement altogether. Sally Alford, a contributor of a symposium on the atonement published as *Atonement Today*,¹⁵² argued “in terms of the feminist critiques,” there must be “a re-evaluation of the Western emphasis on sacrificial imagery and language in conceptualizing the atonement.”¹⁵³ What does she thus propose? She argues for a view of the atonement that would include an “increased emphasis on Jesus’s whole life, death, and resurrection as salvific, and could take up and develop themes suggested by feminist theologians, such as wholeness, healing, reconciliation, creation, birth, and the acceptance and vindication of

¹⁵⁰Stephen J. Wellum, “Recovering the Scandal of the Cross? A Biblical-Theological Evaluation of the Recent Proposal of Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Atlanta, GA, 21 November 2003), 1-2.

¹⁵¹See Joel B. Green, “Kaleidoscopic View,” in *The Nature of the Atonement*, ed. James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 157-85. Thomas R. Schreiner critiques Green and Baker on this very point: “Penal Substitution View,” in *The Nature of the Atonement*, ed. James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 71-72.

¹⁵²John Goldingay, ed., *Atonement Today: A Symposium at St. John’s College Nottingham* (London: SPCK, 1995). In the introduction, Goldingay claims that this work is evangelical in scope, noting “the centrality of the cross for evangelical thinking.” Ibid., xi. Schreiner rightly points out that many of the authors in this volume reject penal substitution in their contributions. See Schreiner, “Penal Substitution View,” 70 n. 13.

¹⁵³Sally Alford, “Sin and Atonement in Feminist Perspective,” in *Atonement Today: A Symposium at St. John’s College Nottingham*, ed. John Goldingay (London: SPCK, 1995), 162.

the oppressed and suffering which we see in Jesus's life, death, and resurrection taken as a whole."¹⁵⁴

The nature of the atonement *as salvific* is expanded to include more than just the death of Christ. Of course, whenever evangelicals discuss the saving death of Jesus, the resurrection is implied as well.¹⁵⁵ But evangelicals who reject penal substitution want to broaden the salvific foundation for atonement. So Elaine Storkey: "The traditional focus on Christ's death is therefore seen as unhelpful for women. Even for those [evangelical?] feminists who do not wish to abandon the special place in the theology of liberation there has to be some repositioning. *The emphasis must now shift to what Jesus lived for rather than what he died for.*"¹⁵⁶

If feminist criticisms of the traditional atonement theories hold, the atonement should be reinterpreted as redemptive in ways which avoid, even reject, the liabilities of the classical models."¹⁵⁷ To mitigate any unwanted theological accretions from classical atonement theories (such as the abusive, violent, "necrophilic" nature of the atonement), some claim that the incarnation, not the cross is redemptive. Joel Green argues for this reallocation of emphasis for atonement in terms of incarnation: "God's saving act *is the incarnation*, which encompasses the whole of his life, including his death."¹⁵⁸ The

¹⁵⁴Ibid.

¹⁵⁵Schreiner, "The Penal Substitution View," 73 n. 25.

¹⁵⁶Storkey, "Who Is the Christ?" 116, emphasis mine.

¹⁵⁷Inbody, *The Many Faces of Christology*, 157. Although Inbody claims to be a blend of evangelical, liberal and post-liberal, he clings to his evangelical upbringing, perhaps because of the pietistic emphasis on personal conversion. Ibid., 10-14.

¹⁵⁸Green, "Kaleidoscopic View," 164, emphasis mine. Green's thesis lends itself to this sort of reductionism, since he wants to conjoin all theories of the atonement

concept for atonement, then, is expanded to involve more than the vicarious death of Jesus on the cross. Inbody reasons, “Although it seems to me that there is a certain logic to the doctrine of penal substitution, I think it is crucial to note that the only way its defenders can save it from a sacralization of abuse, a celebration of suffering, and a deification of death is to set it in the context of the dogma of the incarnation.”¹⁵⁹ Thus, Inbody asserts, “To summarize a reconstructed theology of the atonement bluntly, we are redeemed by the incarnation, not by the cross.”¹⁶⁰

Evaluation and response. All evangelical theologians recognize the necessity of the incarnation, but most do not appropriate it as the *final* explanation for atonement from sin. Wayne Grudem, for example, defines the atonement broadly as “the work Christ did in his life and death to earn our salvation.”¹⁶¹ The reason why Grudem argues that the life of Christ has saving benefits is because he wants to maintain the ideas of the “active” and “passive” obedience of Christ on our behalf.¹⁶² Likewise, Millard Erickson notes that the reconciling work of Christ includes both his incarnation and his death on the cross.¹⁶³ Christ’s humiliation certainly includes the stages of incarnation and death, but Erickson never assumes that the incarnation *in itself* (or even that Jesus’ life) is

together (substitution included, yet without the “penal” notion attached), in support of finding saving significance in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

¹⁵⁹Inbody, *The Many Faces of Christology*, 161.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., 163.

¹⁶¹Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 568.

¹⁶²Ibid., 570-77. Grudem, of course, argues for the priority of the penal substitutionary model. Ibid., 577-79.

¹⁶³Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 788-90.

redemptive. He does, however, argue that the central theme of the atonement is penal substitution.¹⁶⁴

Erickson is not unique among evangelicals for his support and defense of penal substitution as the central motif of the atonement.¹⁶⁵ On the contrary, evangelicals past and present—as heirs of Reformation doctrine—have argued for the centrality of the penal theory.¹⁶⁶ In fact, conservative, evangelical Christians have been guardians of this theory in the face of controversy, detractors, and the constant challenge of liberalism. J. I. Packer, a stalwart defender of penal substitution, recalls, “Throughout my sixty-three years as an evangelical believer, the penal substitutionary understanding of the cross of Christ has been a flashpoint of controversy and division among Protestants. It was so before my time, . . . [and it] remains so, as liberalism keeps reinventing itself and luring evangelicals away from their heritage.”¹⁶⁷ If, however, “The idea of vicarious, penal

¹⁶⁴Ibid., 818-40.

¹⁶⁵A full engagement with and defense of penal substitutionary atonement is beyond the scope of this dissertation. The point of this section is to emphasize the relationship between this theory of the atonement and evangelical theology. For representative, evangelical contributions in favor of penal substitution, see Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 171-75; Hill and James, *The Glory of the Atonement*; Jeffery, Ovey, and Sachs, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*; Letham, *The Work of Christ*; J. I. Packer and Mark Dever, *In My Place Condemned He Stood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007); David Peterson, ed., *Where Wrath and Mercy Meet: Proclaiming the Atonement Today* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2001); Schreiner, “Penal Substitution View”; Stott, *The Cross of Christ*; and Derek Tidball, *The Message of the Cross* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001).

¹⁶⁶Although glimpses of penal substitution are evident in the history of doctrine, the Reformers (especially Luther and Calvin) brought full exposition to this theory. See Gregg Allison, “A History of the Doctrine of the Atonement,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 11, no. 2 (2007): 10ff.; Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 158-66; and L. W. Grensted, *A Short History of the Doctrine of the Atonement* (n.p.: Longmans, Green and Co., 1920; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 191-221.

¹⁶⁷Packer and Dever, *In My Place Condemned He Stood*, 21.

substitution is imbedded in the warp and woof of Scripture,¹⁶⁸ then evangelicals who champion *sola Scriptura* must be ever vigilant to remain faithful to their heritage with respect to atonement theology.

Derek Tidball notes, “Evangelicals have always recognized that no single interpretation of the cross is adequate to explain it all, but the classic evangelical understanding of atonement is found in the idea of penal substitution.”¹⁶⁹ This sentiment is repeated and affirmed time and again,¹⁷⁰ although some critics insist that evangelicals only accept penal substitution in isolation from other motifs as explanatorily sufficient for the atonement. Evangelicals openly and consistently recognize the soteriological significance of the multifaceted work of Christ as depicted in the Bible, yet not without qualification. That is, penal substitution is lauded as “the major linchpin of the doctrine of the atonement.”¹⁷¹ Thomas Schreiner declares that penal substitution “is the heart and

¹⁶⁸Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 171.

¹⁶⁹Tidball, *The Message of the Cross*, 29. Note the recent debate over penal substitution within the UK Evangelical Alliance represented in Derek Tidball, David Hilborn, and Justin Thacker, eds., *The Atonement Debate* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008). This symposium was prompted by the attacks on penal substitution by UK evangelicals Steve Chalke and Alan Mann in *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003). Chalke and Mann appeal to “divine child abuse” as a reason to reject penal substitution.

¹⁷⁰For example, Allison, “A History of the Doctrine of the Atonement,” 17; Henri Blocher, “Biblical Metaphors and the Doctrine of the Atonement,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 4 (2004): 629-45; Mark Dever, “Nothing But the Blood,” *Christianity Today* 50, no. 5 (2006): 29-33; Stephen R. Holmes, *The Wondrous Cross* (Colorado Spring, CO: Paternoster, 2007); and Paul Wells, *Cross Words: The Biblical Doctrine of the Atonement* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2006).

¹⁷¹Roger Nicole, “Postscript on Penal Substitution,” in *The Glory of the Atonement*, ed. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 445. Interestingly, Roger Nicole, an egalitarian, has not responded to the current trend among egalitarians to reject penal substitutionary atonement as a result of feminist criticisms.

soul of an evangelical view of the atonement,” and that it “functions as the anchor and foundation for all other dimensions of the atonement when the Scriptures are considered as a canonical whole.”¹⁷² Indeed, R. Albert Mohler concludes, “Other theories of the atonement may add something to our understanding of the substitutionary nature of Christ’s work, but His work can never be anything less than fully and comprehensively substitutionary. ‘Penal substitution’ is not merely a Latin theory of the atonement; it is, in fact, what the apostles preached.”¹⁷³

Is this debate among evangelicals simply an intramural issue, or is there something more at stake? Joel Green, an egalitarian and outspoken opponent of penal substitution, pleads that “we remind ourselves, often, that debates regarding the appropriateness of penal substitutionary atonement as an exposition of the saving message of Christ comprise an intramural conversation, and not one that can serve to distinguish Christian believer from non-believer or even evangelical from non-evangelical.”¹⁷⁴ Packer disagrees: “Since one’s belief about the atonement is bound up with one’s belief about the character of God, the terms of the gospel and the Christian’s inner life, the intensity of the debate is understandable. If one view is right, others are more or less wrong, and the definition of Christianity itself comes to be at stake.”¹⁷⁵

¹⁷²Schreiner, “Penal Substitution View,” 67. Contra Green, “Kaleidoscopic View,” 157ff.

¹⁷³R. Albert Mohler Jr., “The Glory of Christ as Mediator,” in *The Glory of Christ*, ed. John H. Armstrong (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 67.

¹⁷⁴Joel Green, “Must We Imagine the Atonement in Penal Substitutionary Terms?: Questions, Caveats and a Plea,” in *The Atonement Debate*, ed. Derek Tidball, David Hilborn, and Justin Thacker (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 167.

¹⁷⁵Packer and Dever, *In My Place Condemned He Stood*, 21.

Garry Williams affirms Packer's assessment, with an additional caveat: "If the attack [on penal substitution] is simply on a caricature of the doctrine, all well and good. Then the way forward is simple: the critics need to say they do believe in penal substitution itself and just not in warped forms of it."¹⁷⁶ But if the accusation is against penal substitution as a theory itself, he continues,

I find it impossible to agree with those who maintain that the debate is just an intramural one which can be conducted within the evangelical family. It is hard to maintain this when it has been acknowledged by all parties that we are arguing about who God is, about the creedal doctrine of the Trinity, about the consequences of sin, about how we are saved, and about views which are held to encourage the abuse of women and children. So long as these issues *are* the issues, and I believe that they have been rightly identified, then I cannot see how those who disagree can remain allied together without placing unity above truths which are undeniably central to the Christian faith.¹⁷⁷

Williams's assessment of the seriousness of this discussion is illuminating. Significant doctrinal truths are at stake in this debate, which is fueled in large part by an evangelical capitulation to feminist criticisms of traditional atonement theology (and its alleged practical consequences). When evangelicals are willing to permit feminist criticisms to challenge and rework traditional, evangelical doctrines, there is the dangerous prospect of losing the gospel or one of its various essentials components.

In sum, current trends in evangelical theology demonstrate a willingness to accept feminist critiques of traditional theories for the atonement, particularly against penal substitution. The next step from accepting feminist critiques is the complete rejection of penal substitution as an acceptable explanation for atonement, which is already apparent among evangelicals (e.g., Green and Baker). Thus, the atonement itself

¹⁷⁶Garry J. Williams, "Penal Substitution: A Response to Recent Criticisms," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 1 (2007): 86.

¹⁷⁷*Ibid.*, emphasis original.

is being redefined in terms of the salvific nature of the incarnation itself, in order to avoid the so-called liabilities of the classical atonement theories that emphasize sacrifice, satisfaction, and substitution.

Conclusion

The burden of this chapter has been to investigate the influence of feminist criticisms and ideology within the evangelical community. In tandem with the main thesis of this dissertation, the revisions of evangelical doctrinal distinctives by those who embrace feminist views and proposals is posing great threat to the integrity of the gospel. Egalitarian doctrinal revisions related to the doctrines of God, Scripture, and ecclesiology demonstrate a distinct affirmation of the legitimacy of feminist theology as a helpful companion of and corrective to evangelical theology.

As destructive as egalitarian revisions of these doctrines may be, emerging revisions in evangelical Christology present an even more treacherous challenge to a biblically orthodox understanding of the person and work of Christ. The touchstone issues of Christ's maleness and of penal substitution (or atonement in general) invite much criticism from evangelicals and non-evangelicals alike. Nevertheless, as argued throughout this dissertation, egalitarian evangelicals are vulnerable to succumbing to the lure of feminist ideology which rejects the very foundations of evangelical theology itself.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸Arguably, if egalitarians continue to move theologically leftward, "the entire mosaic of Christian truth" just might be uprooted. See Russell D. Moore, "Evangelical Feminism Lurches Leftward: Is Molly Marshall an 'Evangelical' Feminist?" *Moore to the Point: A Commentary* [on-line]; accessed 4 July 2008; available from http://www.henryinstitute.org/commentary_read.php?cid=124; Internet.

CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

In the introductory essay to his edited work *The Person of Christ*, Murray Rae commences with an insightful consideration: “There have been two major periods in the history of the Christian Church in which the doctrine of the person of Christ has been at the forefront of theological controversy. The first spanned roughly the period between the Councils of Nicaea [*sic*] in 325 and Constantinople in 553. The second we are now in the midst of.”¹ Although Rae offers no suggestion, the Enlightenment is the most likely candidate for the inauguration of this second major period of Christological controversy. Undoubtedly, Christology has languished under the rise of post-Enlightenment biblical and theological studies, given the proposals of Reimarus and Lessing to Troeltsch and Bultmann.² Further, as heirs of the Enlightenment critique, feminist theologians continue the assault on traditional Christology, albeit with different intentions in view.³ Nevertheless, a shared pursuit of these perspectives is the rejection of Chalcedon’s Christ.

¹Murray A. Rae, “Introduction,” in *The Person of Christ*, ed. Stephen R. Holmes and Murray A. Rae (New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 1.

²Stephen J. Wellum, “The Problem of Christ: Who Is He? The Quest for the ‘Historical Jesus’” (classroom lecture notes, 84940—*Christology and Incarnation Seminar*, Spring 2006, photocopy), 1-13.

³Kathryn Greene-McCreight, *Feminist Reconstructions of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 28-54.

Thus, this dissertation's thesis is that feminist Christological explorations and proposals demonstrate a clear rejection of biblical, classical (i.e., patriarchal) Christology, and as a result are unacceptable for evangelical Christological formulation. In support of the thesis, feminist criticisms and proposals regarding Christ's person and work were presented, analyzed, and judged to be inconsistent with (and in some cases contrary to) both the biblical data and traditional Christian doctrine. In addition, the influence of feminist ideas among evangelicals was demonstrated and considered inappropriate for traditional, evangelical Christology.

Summary of Feminist Christology

One of the primary goals of religious feminist Christology is to re-image Jesus Christ into a symbol more consonant with women's experience. As demonstrated in chapter 2, women's experience is the starting point for feminist theology and serves as its primary source of authority. Feminist theologians do not approach Christology, as evangelicals do, through the normative authority of Scripture. The Bible contributes to feminist Christology, however, in that it contains information about the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth, as well as the company of disciples that followed him. At the same time, feminists find the Bible to be part of the problem itself, because it represents a patriarchal worldview incongruent with feminist ideology. Therefore, the Bible must be read critically and suspiciously through the lens of women's experience, in order to achieve liberation from the tyranny of androcentrism and to promote an emancipatory praxis for women.⁴

⁴Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, rev. ed. (Boston: Beacon, 1995), 136.

Regarding the person of Christ, feminists have offered a number of criticisms against the traditional view and also a number of constructive proposals to make Christology more “inclusive” of women. The maleness of Jesus Christ is perceived as problematic for most feminist theologians. Some argue that Jesus’ maleness is nothing more than an irrelevant particularity, such as his height or eye color. But the majority of feminists argue that the historical particularity of Jesus’ gender has been used in Christian theology to the significant detriment of women. For example, Jesus’ maleness has been used as a tool for the subordination of women, particularly in terms of representative ministerial leadership. Even worse, the salvation of women is in jeopardy since Jesus represents (in his male body) only half the human race.

In light of these criticisms, feminists seek to minimize the maleness of Jesus by altering their conception of his identity. First, Jesus is viewed to be simply a prophetic voice among his peers, speaking out against injustice and attempting to subvert the patriarchalism of his day. In this view, Jesus’ message is important, not his maleness.⁵ Second, the man Jesus is eclipsed by the Christian community as the locus of redemption.⁶ In this perspective, Jesus’ historical identity is insignificant for Christology. Instead, Christology is collapsed into ecclesiology in order to bypass the liabilities of a traditional Christology centered on Jesus of Nazareth. Third, and perhaps the most popular feminist reconstruction, involves viewing Jesus as the incarnation of a female

⁵Rosemary Radford Ruether, “The Liberation of Christology from Patriarchy,” in *Feminist Theology: A Reader*, ed. Ann Loades (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 147.

⁶Rita Nakashima Brock, “The Feminist Redemption of Christ,” in *Christian Feminism: Visions of a New Humanity*, ed. Judith L. Weidman (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 68-69.

deity, namely, Sophia.⁷ The strength of this view is the textual basis upon which it is built, appealing to the wisdom motif of the Bible and its connection with Jesus Christ (cf. Prov 8; 1 Cor 1:20-30). Nevertheless, this feminist understanding of Christ is speculative at best and pagan at worst. These reconstructions do not preserve the biblical portrait of Jesus Christ, but rather distort it to fit the feminist agenda.

Regarding the work of Christ, feminists are more unified in their criticism against a traditional understanding of the atonement. Feminist theologians deride the traditional view of the atonement as the glorification of suffering and death; it is too violent, bloody, and enamored with death. As such, feminists contend that the cross is a picture of “divine child abuse,” because in it God the Father is punishing his innocent Son.⁸ Feminists contend that every traditional theory of the atonement reduces to this picture, from the *Christus Victor* theory to penal substitutionary theory. Feminists particularly disdain penal substitution because of its insistence that Jesus bore God’s wrath and satisfied his justice.

In light of these concerns and criticisms, feminists redefine atonement or reject it altogether. First, although the atonement magnifies Jesus’ suffering, many feminists argue that the cross depicts God’s solidarity with suffering humanity. Thus, Jesus’ cross is not about bearing the sins of the world or placating God’s wrath. Instead, God demonstrates his love for us by participating in the suffering of the world. Secondly,

⁷Elizabeth A. Johnson, “Wisdom Was Made Flesh and Pitched Her Tent among Us,” in *Reconstructing the Christ Symbol*, ed. Maryanne Stevens (New York: Paulist, 1993), 95-117.

⁸Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, “For God So Loved the World?” in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse*, ed. Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1989), 1-30.

some feminists prefer to abandon the idea (and the necessity) of atonement completely.⁹ Because the cross is violent and death-dealing, many feminists insist that it has become an inadequate symbol for redemption and salvation; and thus, other means must be considered.

The traditional understanding of atonement is also castigated by feminists for its alleged connection to domestic violence and abuse. The argument is, if God the Father can rightly punish his innocent Son, then human relationships with similar structures of authority can do so as well.¹⁰ This argument was considered seriously and deemed to be illegitimate on the grounds that a misappropriation of a doctrine or Christian teaching does not invalidate the doctrine itself. This is not to say that some who hold to traditional atonement theology do not appeal to this model in defense of their authoritarianism and sinful acts. Further, the rejection of this feminist allegation does not imply that evangelicals are unconcerned with domestic abuse. On the contrary, evangelicals are concerned with abuse and vehemently oppose it.¹¹ The difference is, however, evangelicals do not blame the cross for the continuance of domestic abuse, but rather the sin for which the cross has paid the price.

Feminist Christology is a multifaceted and complex discipline that weaves together feminist ideology, criticisms against traditional theology, and constructive proposals in order to use the symbols of Jesus Christ and the cross in terms beneficial to

⁹Joanne Carlson Brown, "Divine Child Abuse?" *Daughters of Sarah* 18, no. 3 (1992): 24-28.

¹⁰Ibid., 26.

¹¹David Powlison, Paul David Tripp, and Edward T. Welch, "Pastoral Responses to Domestic Abuse," in *Pastoral Leadership for Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. Wayne Grudem and Dennis Rainey (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 265-76.

women and inclusive of women's experience. Clearly, however, feminist Christology is not biblical, nor is it consistent with the doctrinal witness of believers throughout the history of the Church. Even so, as strange as some feminist ideas may sound, their critiques are finding a welcome reception in contemporary theology, including some sectors of evangelical theology.¹²

Evangelical Response(s) to Feminist Christology

In his trenchant doctoral dissertation on feminist Christology, Neil Tucker Gant concludes that feminist Christology causes evangelicals to rethink and communicate more adequately their theological classifications and distinctives.¹³ On the one hand, feminists have raised important critiques regarding God and gender, theological anthropology, and the human identity and mission of Jesus. On the other hand, feminists have segregated themselves from Christian orthodoxy in terms of their rejection of scriptural authority, their rejection of the deity and uniqueness of Jesus, their obfuscation of atonement theology, and their revisions of sin and salvation.¹⁴ Gant's assessment is both insightful and compelling: in the face of feminist criticisms, evangelicals must take the opportunity to clarify their doctrinal commitments, repent from our sins of pride and partiality, and to present a cogent defense against proposals that have the potential to erode the foundations of Christian belief and to bring evangelical theology to extinction.

¹²Cf. Colin J. D. Greene, *Christology in Cultural Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 218-45.

¹³Neil Tucker Gant, "An Analysis of Feminist Christology: Its Historical Background, Hermeneutical Foundations, and Implications for Southern Baptists" (Ph.D. diss, Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1994), 130.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 132-48.

Evangelicals are divided in their response and reaction to feminist criticisms. On the surface, complementarians are considerably more hesitant than egalitarians to embrace positively the critiques and proposals offered by feminist theologians. This dissertation argues in chapter 5 that egalitarians are using feminist critiques as a paradigm for revisions in evangelical theology. As Wayne Grudem suggests, egalitarianism—or evangelical feminism—often follows non-evangelical feminism in the undermining of scriptural authority, the challenge of orthodox trinitarianism, and the denial of anything uniquely masculine (especially related to theological matters like biblical God-language and Jesus’ gender).¹⁵

Interestingly, one of the hallmarks of evangelical theology is a commitment to the inspiration and authority of Scripture. Complementarians and egalitarians alike affirm this distinctive as implicit to evangelical identity. Yet, egalitarians are willing to embrace feminist criticisms of the Bible itself, which in turn affect subsequent theological formulation. As demonstrated in chapter 5, egalitarians align with feminists on the rejection of patriarchy (especially biblical patriarchy), on revisions of God-language to include calling God “Mother,” and on the criticisms of Jesus’ maleness and of atonement theology. This dissertation presents a contrasting view, however. Specifically, feminist criticisms are resisted and rejected with regard to these important doctrinal distinctives. The patriarchal vision of the Bible is retained, safeguarding masculine God-language, as well as the necessity and particularity of Jesus’ maleness. The patriarchal storyline of Scripture is deemed also as essential to Christology—from the promise of the male child

¹⁵Cf. Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006). Of course, this is a broad generalization. Not all egalitarians follow non-evangelicals for their revisions in evangelical theology.

that will crush the head of the Serpent (Gen 3:15) to the reigning male King of kings and Lord of lords in the eschatological new heavens and new earth (Rev 21:1-22:5).¹⁶

Clearly, many egalitarians show in their doctrinal revisions the compounding problems for Christology that arise when the patriarchal narrative is rejected or revised according to feminist critiques. In contrast, John Webster notes: “Jesus Christ presents himself in this definite form, through the testimony of the prophets and apostles; he is radiant *here*, in a way that requires Christology to discover in Scripture the clarity that he already has, rather than cast around for some other kind of clarity.”¹⁷ He continues,

And in the light of this very definite subject matter which presents itself in Holy Scripture with radiant force, Christology is subject to very definite limits beyond which it is prohibited to go. To the *clarity* of the gospel in Scripture there corresponds its *sufficiency*: the thought and speech of the church in the matter of Jesus Christ do not require some supplements to Scripture, for the instrument through which Jesus Christ announces himself is, by virtue of the Spirit’s work, adequate for the task that it is appointed to undertake.¹⁸

Further, as Richard Reid argues, Christology *must be* biblical for three reasons: first, because the Bible provides the *context* for our Christological statements; second, because the Bible gives us the *content* for our Christology; and third, the Bible makes it possible to affirm the *continuity* between our Christological affirmations and the words and deeds

¹⁶Note also Paul’s eschatological vision in 1 Cor 15:24-28 that defends a patriarchal worldview: the Son will hand over the kingdom to the Father and the Son himself will be subjected to him. Cf. Jack Cottrell, “The Gender of Jesus and the Incarnation: A Case Study in Feminist Hermeneutics,” 10 [on-line]; accessed 11 April 2006; available from http://www.cbmw.org/images/articles_pdf/cottrell_jack/genderofjesus.pdf; Internet.

¹⁷John Webster, “Prolegomena to Christology: Four Theses,” in *The Person of Christ*, ed. Stephen R. Holmes and Murray A. Rae (New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 34, emphasis original.

¹⁸Ibid., 34-35, emphasis original.

of Jesus himself.¹⁹ Such a biblical Christology must be at the same time a patriarchal Christology, because the biblical narrative is, in fact, patriarchal. Therefore, Christology as conceived by religious feminists is unacceptable for evangelical Christological formulation. Evangelicals must not surrender traditional Christological distinctives based on the biblical narrative to feminist criticisms. For if this surrender occurs, Christology opens up to descriptors alien to scriptural categories and, consequently produce a Messiah and a message foreign to the apostolic gospel (Gal 1:6-12).

Recommendations for Further Study

In the course of this analysis of feminist Christology, several areas became evident that extended beyond the scope of this inquiry. One such area concerns the relationship between patriarchy and abuse. Although this dissertation argues that there is no direct or inevitable relationship between patriarchy and abuse, additional work might be pursued to offer an exegetical, theological, or pastoral defense against the alleged connection. Further, this additional work might bear important fruit for a complementarian discussion of abuse in light of a commitment to male headship and also provide a ready resource for ministers and churches.²⁰

Another option for further study might be a critical analysis of gender in contemporary theology, and particularly within evangelicalism. This study would include

¹⁹Richard Reid, "The Necessity of a Biblical Christology," in *Who Do You Say That I Am? Christology and the Church*, ed. Donald Armstrong (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 28.

²⁰Egalitarians are out producing complementarians when it comes to written articles and books related to abuse and its foundations. This statement does not imply that complementarians are not addressing the issue, however. See the discussion on pp. 151-59 of this dissertation.

biological and sociological analysis in tandem with biblical-theological data for a holistic understanding of gender and identity in religious discourse. Much of the defense of Jesus' maleness in this dissertation assumes a traditional understanding of gender in terms of Jesus' masculinity directly and exclusively tied to his physical male biology. I also expect that there are divergent viewpoints to my perspective, which might make an interesting (and probably frustrating) doctoral thesis.

A final suggestion for continuing this dissertation's work concerns an evangelical analysis of feminist hamartiology and soteriology. Certainly, feminist theology, as a subset of liberation theology, is especially concerned with deliverance from the oppression of sexism. Ironically, however, feminists have been surreptitious in their explication of the doctrines of sin and salvation.²¹ Even so, such a project would yield added support to the analysis of this dissertation, since feminist Christological claims must be linked with soteriological and hamartiological concerns. Feminist theology is a vast expanse, indeed. Further research on the feminist understanding of sin and salvation would certainly traverse important and original territory, and yield significant insight into feminist liberation theology.

Final Reflections

Based on her insightful investigation of feminist theology, Mary Kassian concludes that if evangelicals continue to absorb feminist thought into their theological

²¹Neither doctrine is articulated from a feminist perspective in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (New York: HarperCollins, 1993); or *Feminist and Womanist Essays in Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Amy Plantinga Pauw and Serene Jones (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006).

formulation, successive generations of Christians will suffer the loss of orthodox Christianity.²² Kassian's conclusion is sound, given the advancement of feminist Christological critiques within evangelicalism. Thus, this dissertation is an attempt to expose, clarify, analyze, and address feminist Christology and its influence in evangelical theology. Moreover, the desired result of this inquiry is that evangelicals (especially egalitarians) seriously consider the feminist claims presented here, in order that our Christological formulation might be clearer and more biblical yet remaining unabated by the nefarious assault of feminist ideology.

Furthermore, evangelicals must not be preoccupied with merely an academic approach to Christology, but rather understand, embrace, and experience the personal import of Paul's declaration in 1 Corinthians 2:2: "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." Thus, as David Wells reminds us:

In Christology, then, we can only philosophize from faith, not to faith, and our thought must resonate with what Christ reveals himself to be through Scripture, with the revealed purpose of his coming, and not with the ways we might like to see him as modern people. This means that to understand Christ aright, we must also know something about our own guilt. We must know ourselves to be sinners. We must have hungered and thirsted after righteousness. The New Testament, after all, was not written for the curious, for historians, or even for biblical scholars, but for those, in all ages and cultures, who want to be forgiven and to know God.²³

May God be honored by our humble submission to his authoritative Word as we formulate our Christology, and may he be pleased with our dependence on his Son Jesus Christ, whom he put forth as a propitiation for our sins (Rom 3:25)—the only mediator between him and us, the man Christ Jesus (1 Tim 2:5).

²²Mary Kassian, *The Feminist Mistake* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 287.

²³David F. Wells, *The Person of Christ* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1984), 175.

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ABSTRACT

AN EVANGELICAL ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE OF FEMINIST CHRISTOLOGY

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This dissertation analyzes the person and work of Christ in feminist theology, with particular attention to feminist critiques of traditional Christology. Chapter 1 is a brief introduction of the dissertation's thesis and the methodological commitments from which the dissertation proceeds.

Chapter 2 provides an investigation and analysis of feminist theological method. Special attention is given to the influential work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Rosemary Radford Ruether. The sources and norms of feminist theology are considered also. Chapter 2 concludes with a discussion of the importance of feminist theological methodology for feminist Christology.

Chapter 3 analyzes the person of Christ in feminist theology. Particular consideration is given to feminist arguments against the maleness of Jesus, as well as their alternative proposals to make Christology more inclusive of women. The chapter also offers a sustained evangelical response to the feminist ideas regarding Christ's person.

Chapter 4 examines the work of Christ in feminist theology. The feminist contention that the cross is "divine child abuse" is addressed. Feminist assessment of

classical atonement theories and alternative perspectives for understanding atonement are discussed. The chapter also challenges and answers the feminist allegation that traditional atonement theology grounds the perpetuation of violence and abuse.

Chapter 5 assesses the influence of feminist criticisms within evangelicalism, especially among egalitarians. The chapter demonstrates egalitarian doctrinal revisions on the basis of an acceptance of feminist criticisms in the theological loci of theology proper, bibliology, and ecclesiology. Finally, emerging Christological revisions are considered, specifically related to the egalitarian resistance to the maleness of Jesus and also to a penal substitutionary understanding of atonement. Chapter 5 concludes that feminist criticisms are unacceptable for evangelical Christological formulation.

Chapter 6 concludes the dissertation with a brief summary of feminist Christology and evangelical responses, and offers recommendations for further study in this and related areas.

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