

**University of KwaZulu-Natal**

**EXAMINING THE SOCIAL, RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL  
DISCOURSES ON “*MALENESS*” AND ITS POSSIBLE  
INFLUENCE ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA:  
A CRITIQUE OF SOME EXPRESSIONS OF EVANGELICAL  
THEOLOGY**

**KENNEDY O. OWINO.**

**2009.**

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ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA: A CRITIQUE OF  
SOME EXPRESSIONS OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY**

**BY**

**KENNEDY O. OWINO.**

**A Dissertation**

**Submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social  
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**MASTERS OF THEOLOGY (SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY)**

**In the School of Religion and Theology at the University of  
KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg—South Africa.**

**Supervisor: Prof. Isabel A. Phiri.**

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation, unless specifically indicated in the text, is my own work. It is submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Theology, in the School of Religion and Theology, at the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus, South Africa.

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work firstly to the woman I love so much, my mother, who suffered great abuse and raised me up under conditions of enormous violence and abuse from the man she married and knew as her husband. In all your patience, sufferings and perseverance in God, your hard work and love for your family has contributed to what and who I am today. Secondly, to the thousands of women in South Africa and beyond who find themselves trapped in abusive and oppressive relationships. May this work act as a spring board from which numerous such other works could be inspired among evangelical scholars and Christians from other traditions, with a purpose of establishing the truth that female and male hold equal worth, honor and dignity in God in whose image and likeness we are all created.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I SHOULD BE sadly lacking courtesy if at the beginning of this study I did not express my most sincere thanks to all those who have in one way or the other contributed to making this study a success.

I express my sincere thanks to the School of Religion and Theology for finding me worthy of their financial support hence awarding me the *Nurnberger Bursary* for the year 2009. This has enabled me to complete my God-given dream for pursuing a masters degree in theology.

My deepest gratitude goes to Prof. Isabel. Apawo Phiri for her inspiring teaching on a wide range of urgent issues of concern in Africa from a perspective of gender and religion, African theology, African women's theology and Systematic theology. Her supervision of this dissertation gave it the focus it holds through her scholarly advice, constructive critiques, her encouragement and tireless efforts towards assisting me shape this study to what it is now. Thank you for your confidence in me. Equally, Prof. Anthony Balcomb deserves a special mention for reading through copies and copies of proposals, and for his uncompromising comments that have given this study a particular evangelical thrust within the South Africa context.

A vote of appreciation is due to The Rt. Rev. Bishop Dr. Warwick Cole Edwards and Rev. Luis Esteves whose theological thoughts and advice furnished my critical thinking towards this study from an evangelical perspective. Special thanks also go to Mrs. Kerry Bause for accepting to edit and read through this work for language and grammatical corrections. Thank you for your English language proficiency.

Overall, all these could not have been achieved without the guidance, strength and wisdom that come from God.

## ABSTRACT

My journey in writing this dissertation has been both intellectually and emotionally challenging keeping in mind firstly that I am a male scholar (an “outsider”) responding to issues related to *maleness*, the abuse and oppression of women. Secondly, that I have a personal “sacred story” of the effects of abuse and violence in the home where I grew up; and thirdly, that I am strongly a conservative evangelical by faith. However, these three aspects interplay in contributing to my motivation of seeking for a mended world especially for professing Christian women within the evangelical context.

The focus of this study is: *Examining the social, religious and cultural discourses on “maleness” and its possible influence on domestic violence in South Africa: A critique of some expressions of evangelical theology*. The study argues that the predominant social, religious and cultural discourses portray some expressions of evangelical theology. It maintains that our distorted perceptions of God (how we have imagined God as “male”)—hence *maleness*, has influenced male paradigm of domination among partners. As a result, this has possibly influenced and contributed to domestic violence (DV), abuse and oppression of women within some evangelical context in South Africa. Hence, the prevalence of abuse and oppression of women in the evangelical context, the battle for the humanity and dignity of women as human beings created in God’s image and that female and male are equal in God are motivations that made me pursue this study.

Having evaluated the theology and the inherited evangelical traditions, it becomes certain that transformative praxis that counteracts abusive and oppressive ideologies against women among evangelicals is imperative. To achieve this, the study has used an already published case study on interviews conducted among Christian women in the Full Gospel Church (FGC) in Phoenix, Durban. This has been used to facilitate theological observations. In seeking to answer its research question the dissertation examines and critiques the predominant discourses portrayed as some *expressions of evangelical theology* in chapters four, five and six as analysed from the said case study. The study achieves this purpose by engaging a theological reflection as its methodology through applying a “*feminist theology of praxis*” as its theoretical framework. Hence, the study proposes alternative evangelical theological discourses and resources for transformative praxis as its focus. The findings are tentative and require future empirical research.

Arguing that “Theological statements contain as much truth as they deliver practically in transforming reality” (Sölle quoted in Ackermann 1996:42), the dissertation concludes with addressing the implications of this study by proposing practical ways for transforming men, aiming at deconstructing abusive and oppressive male paradigms.

## **Abbreviations**

AICs	African Independent Churches.
CSVR	Center for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation.
DCS	Durban Case Study.
DV	Domestic Violence.
FGC	Full Gospel Church.
HRW	Human Right Watch.
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence.
MRC	Medical Research Council.
NGOs	Non Governmental Organisations.
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version.
RET	Reformed Evangelical Tradition.
SACC	South African Council of Churches.
SAPS	South African Police Service.
PASCA	Pietermaritzburg Agency for Social Awareness.
URDR	The Unit for Religion and Development Research
UPMN	United Pentecostal Mission of Natal
UN	United Nations.
VAW	Violence against women.
WCC	World Council of Churches.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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	<b>PAGE.</b>
<b>Declaration.</b>	<b>ii.</b>
<b>Dedication.</b>	<b>iii.</b>
<b>Acknowledgments.</b>	<b>iv.</b>
<b>Abstract.</b>	<b>v.</b>
<b>Abbreviations.</b>	<b>vi.</b>
<b>Table of Contents.</b>	<b>vii-x.</b>
 <b>CHAPTER ONE</b>	
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	
1.0 Introduction.	1.
1.1 Background and motivation for undertaking the research.	2.
1.2 Research discussion: Hypothesis, the research problem and key questions.	4.
1.3 The research objectives.	5.
1.4 Preliminary literature review.	5.
1.4.1 Literature portraying some expressions of evangelical theology and abuse.	
1.4.2 Literature on the Image of God as Male and its influence on violence abuse and oppression of women.	
1.4.3 Literature on alternative evangelical theological discourses and resources for transformation.	
1.5 Theoretical framework.	.
1.6 Research design and methodology.	9.
1.6.1 Research method.	
1.6.2 The significance of the research and its limitations.	
1.6.3 The research ethics.	
1.6.4. The overall structure of the dissertation.	
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>12.</b>

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND ITS THEOLOGICAL CONCEPTS**

<b>2.0</b> Introduction.	13.
<b>2.1</b> The appropriate feminist theoretical framework for the study.	13.
<b>2.1.1</b> Definition of feminism (s) and feminist theology.	16.
<b>2.1.2</b> Feminist theology: A concern in African Christian theology.	18.
<b>Conclusion</b>	19.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **UNDERSTANDING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE OF WOMEN WITHIN THE EVANGELICAL CONTEXT IN SOUTH AFRICA**

<b>3.0</b> Introduction.	20.
<b>3.1</b> Preliminary observations.	20.
<b>3.2</b> An overview of domestic violence against women in South Africa.	21.
<b>3.2.1</b> Historical context of South Africa and its influence on violence against women.	
<b>3.2.2</b> Status of women in South Africa.	
<b>3.2.3</b> The response of the South African government to violence and abuse of women.	
<b>3.3</b> A case study on Full Gospel Church in Phoenix, Durban: Domestic violence and abuse Within the evangelical context.	25.
<b>3.3.1</b> Background information of the research done in Phoenix Durban.	
<b>3.3.2</b> The historical setting of the Full Gospel Church in South Africa.	
<b>3.3.3</b> The cultural and religious position of Indian Christian women.	
<b>3.3.4</b> Theological observations on domestic violence in Christian homes: A Durban case study on Full Gospel Church, Phoenix.	29.
<b>3.3.4.1</b> Domestic violence: Definitions and terminologies.	
<b>3.3.4.2</b> Forms and the nature of domestic violence.	
<b>3.3.4.3</b> Prevalence of abuse within the Full Gospel Church, Phoenix.	
<b>3.3.4.4</b> Predominant discourses portrayed as some expressions of Evangelical theology.	32.
<b>Conclusion</b>	33.

## **CHAPTERFOUR**

### **EXAMINING THE EXPRESSIONS OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY IN DISCOURSES OF “MALENESS” FROM SCRIPTURE INTERPRETATION**

<b>4.0</b> Introduction.	34.
<b>4.1</b> Evangelicalism and evangelical theology.	34.
<b>4.1.1</b> Evangelicalism: A historical synopsis.	
<b>4.1.2</b> Evangelicalism and the interpretation of Scriptures.	
<b>4.2</b> Expressions of evangelical theology and Scripture interpretations.	38.
<b>4.2.1</b> Theological observations: Case Study on the Full Gospel Church.	
<b>4.2.2</b> The evangelical interpretation of Scriptures and the imaging of God.	40.
<b>4.2.3</b> Discourses on “ <i>maleness</i> ”: When God is male.	
<b>4.2.4</b> Traditional attitudes towards women.	
<b>4.3</b> A critical look on evangelical interpretation of Scriptures.	45.
<b>Conclusion</b>	48.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **EXAMINING THE EXPRESSIONS OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY IN DISCOURSES OF “MALENESS” AND MARRIAGE**

<b>5.0</b> Introduction.	49.
<b>5.1</b> Theological observation on the Full Gospel Church in Phoenix.	49.
<b>5.2</b> The theological and historical observations on the expected subservient position of women under men.	51.
<b>5.2.1</b> The nature of marriage relationship: A Jewish perspective.	
<b>5.2.2</b> The nature of male, female relationship: A philosophical perspective.	
<b>5.2.3</b> The nature of marriage relationship: A Christian perspective.	
<b>5.3</b> The implications of the historical and theological traditions on evangelical theology.	55.
<b>5.3.1</b> The predominant concerns.	
<b>5.3.2</b> The mechanism of women abuse: The home as a base of power, authority and dominion.	58.
<b>Conclusion</b>	63.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **EXAMINING THE EXPRESSIONS OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY IN DISCOURSES OF “MALENESS,” FORGIVENESS AND CHRISTIAN SUFFERING**

<b>6.0</b> Introduction.	64.
<b>6.1</b> Theological observations on discourses on forgiveness in the Context of violence and abuse.	64.
<b>6.2</b> Theological observations on discourses of women as “suffering servants” in the context of violence and abuse.	67.
<b>6.3</b> Christian suffering as an influence on abuse and oppression of women within an evangelical context.	68.
<b>6.3.1</b> The concept of suffering in the Christian tradition.	
<b>6.3.2</b> The two theological dimensions of suffering that influence abuse and violence against women in an evangelical context.	
<b>6.3.3</b> Revisioning Christian suffering as an expression of Evangelical Theology that influence abuse and violence against women.	71.
<b>Conclusion</b>	73.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **ALTEERNATIVE EVANGELICAL THEOLOGIES, DISCOURSES AND RESOURCES FOR TRANSFORMATION**

<b>7.0</b> Introduction.	74.
<b>7.1</b> The need for alternative theological discourses and resources for transformation.	74.
<b>7.2</b> Alternative evangelical theologies and discourses for transformation.	76.
<b>7.2.1</b> Theologies of life and a search for a community of life.	76.
<b>7.2.2</b> Trinitarian theologies of communal and relationship.	79.
<b>7.2.3</b> Theologies of transition and transformation.	82.
<b>7.2.3.1</b> A Kenōsis of maleness modeled on Christlike servanthood	
<b>7.2.3.2</b> Mutual submission based on the “priesthood of all believers.”	
<b>7.2.4</b> Reconstructing “violent masculinities” to “mature masculinity.”	86.
<b>7.2.5</b> Rethinking the theology of sin in the context of violence and abuse.	90.
<b>7.3</b> The “how question” of transformative praxis.	92.

**Conclusion.** 95.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

**CONCLUSIONS AND GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY.** 96.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY.** 100-109.

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Introduction

The dominant belief among bible believing evangelical Christians is that God is Spirit. The male dominated theological academy that has since existed until only recently when women scholars began to engage theologically has constructed a personified image of God as masculine through the language (metaphors and analogies) of the Scripture. As a result, *maleness* has been classified as superior and femininity is associated with inferiority yet the church teaches about the equality, worth and value of male and female as created in the image of God. This paradox lies at the heart of seeking to understand how the notions of *maleness* has the possibility of contributing to abusive and oppressive behavior portrayed by men towards women among partners in evangelical contexts.

It is my intentional focus in this dissertation, I hope, to analytically critique and challenge what this study has identified as *predominant discourses portrayed as some expressions of evangelical theology* as having a possibility of promoting domestic violence (DV), abuse and oppressions of women. As the title of the dissertation suggests, the study has examined the existing literatures on the subject of DV and abuse of women from an interdisciplinary approach. This dissertation intends to systematically examine how the social, religious and cultural discourses and notions of *maleness* have possible influence on DV, abuse and oppression of women within the evangelical context in South Africa. The study argues that the predominant discourses portray some of the expressions of evangelical theology. Theologically, it has been deduced that the distorted perceptions of the image of God constructs to a masculine perception of God which leads to concepts of "*maleness*." This has then influenced a male paradigm of domination that has possible subsequent contribution to abusive and oppressive behaviors from men within the evangelical context.

Hence, this chapter gives a general introduction and an overview to this dissertation. This includes the background information to the study, the relevance of the study, the research problem and objectives, and a brief structure to the dissertation. The chapter argues for the need of a theological reflection from an evangelical perspective in ascertaining how notions of "*maleness*" can contribute to abuse of women with an aim of exploring transformative evangelical alternatives geared towards praxis for change within the evangelical context.

## 1.1 Background and motivation for undertaking the research

The background of this study is rooted on the premise that our religious ethos (Christianity in this case) has the capacity to bring change and transformation within abusive cultures and as a result cause a social impact in the lives of its adherers. Unfortunately, this has not been the case. Froise (1994:ix) strongly raises questions on the ambivalent nature of religiosity in South Africa and states: "We have regarded ourselves as a Christian country, but has it been a Christian culture or a personalized faith?" It is from such assertions that one begins to question the nature of Christian proclamations and theology that seems to have no transformation on its people. Is it just a religion? Scholars have observed that over the past 100 years, Christianity is experiencing a profound southern shift in its geographical centre of gravity. For instance, Bediako (1995:viii) optimistically depicts this new trend by arguing that the African continent had a perhaps surprisingly important place in what was being increasingly recognized as a shift in the whole centre of gravity of Christianity.<sup>1</sup> It is within this context that statistics indicates to us that 77-80 percent of the total South African population (49 million) claim affiliation with some form of Christianity.<sup>2</sup>

However, studies of male-female relationships within the South African context demonstrates the evidence of violence, abuse, suffering and the ugliness of brokenness, resulting in structures of oppression, injustices, marginalization, dehumanization and deaths of women. Although viewed as a worldwide crisis, violence and abuse against women calls not only for a sociological or a feminist engagement, but thorough theological attention. I content that an examination of some expressions of evangelical theology is required especially among those who adhere to the evangelical tradition. It is vital to keep in mind that some Protestant churches are "break aways" from the so called main line churches with an intention of excising subordination and domination from the nature of mainstream theology. The question that still remains for us is whether the subordination of women in some of the evangelical churches takes a major priority in their agenda as evangelicals.

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<sup>1</sup> Barrett had written that "African Christianity might well tip the balance and transform Christianity permanently into a primarily non-western religion (Bediako 1995:viii). This is confirmed by Johnson (2001).

<sup>2</sup> According to the religious demography from the 2001 census, approximately 80% of the population belonged to the Christian faith. Christian churches included the Dutch Reformed family of churches, which consisted of approximately 6.7 percent of the population, and the Roman Catholic Church, which consisted of approximately 7.1 percent. Protestant denominations include the Methodist (6.8 percent), Anglican (3.8 percent), Lutheran (2.5 percent), Presbyterian (1.9 percent), Baptist (1.5 percent), and Congregational (1.1 percent) churches. The remaining 48.6% comprises the largest traditional Pentecostal churches which are the Apostolic Faith Mission, the Assemblies of God, and the Full Gospel Church. A number of charismatic churches have been established in recent years. Their subsidiary churches, together with those of the Hatfield Christian Church in Pretoria, were grouped in the International Fellowship of Christian Churches. The Greek Orthodox and Seventh-day Adventist churches also are active. The African Independent Churches (AICs) are the largest group of Christian churches. There are more than 4,000 of these churches, with a total membership of more than ten million (Bureau of Demography, Human Right and Labour 2006:1-4); <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006>

Citing Boswell, Waldman (2006:84), argues that within South Africa, gender-based violence has been “much talked about,” characterized as “endemic” and “normalized.” Further research indicates that South Africa experiences a high level of violent crime and is rated higher than any other Interpol state.<sup>3</sup> Concurrently, despite the vast amount of research and media attention on domestic violence and abuse of women in South Africa, this still remains a complicated scenario to be addressed. The paradox, therefore, is how can it be that such a “spiritual” and religious South Africa with the best constitution in the world on the protection of women is at the same time rated the highest in figures of violence with DV and abuse being predominant? Such a context begs the question: “What impact has our theological engagement and reflection contributed (if any) as alternative resources for transformation?” Has theological articulations from evangelicals achieved any social, religious and cultural transformation in our societies? Such questions have prompted my desire as an evangelical to undertake this study by examining some of the predominant discourses portrayed as expressions of evangelical theology on notions of “maleness” in supporting patriarchal discourses that indirectly and directly influence violence, abuse and oppression of women in South Africa within the evangelical tradition.

To ascertain my objectives this study has used secondary literature as its sources of information. One of such data is a research conducted among couples in the FGC in Durban, as an evangelical church with a Pentecostal tradition. In particular, the study has used a research on “*Domestic violence in Christian Homes: A Durban Case Study*,” that was specifically focused on this denomination. The literature<sup>4</sup> has been used as a case study to draw out theological observations on some expressions of evangelical theology. These have been examined to ascertain its possible influence on violence, abuse, and oppression against women among partners within the evangelical context.

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<sup>3</sup> In their research on national female homicide in South Africa—“Effects of South African Men having witnessed abuse of their mothers during Childhood on their levels of violence in Adulthood” (2005), Abrahams and Jewkes indicate that the rate of homicides of women aged 14-29 years was 17.6 per 100,000. This rate is substantially higher than those for women aged 10-29 in the *World Report on Violence and Health* in that 76-country study. This suggests that domestic violence and gender abuse are escalating violent crimes in South Africa affecting all communities and takes many forms.

<sup>4</sup> The literature used as primary data is from the article; Phiri, Isabel A. 2001. Domestic Violence in Christian Homes: A Durban Case Study. In: *Journal of the Study of Religion. Transition and Transformation in South Africa: Aspects of Women’s Spirituality*. Vol. 14, No. 2. Pg. 85-101. This is a research that was conducted among couples in the Full Gospel Pentecostal Church in Phoenix, Durban. The context under which the research was achieved has been elaborated in detail in chapter three with the intention of drawing out some expressions of evangelical theology that could facilitate dialogue on discourses on the notion of “maleness” and its influence on abuse and violence among intimates. This article has not been used as a decisive literature and the only source from which the expressions of evangelical theology have been engaged in the process of a theological reflection. This literature is used as a case study that contains social, religious and cultural discourses with potential projections of theological themes and notions on “maleness” with possible influence on violence, abuse and oppression of women within an evangelical context. This is therefore used as a gate way to explore, expose and examine some expressions of evangelical theology within the evangelical tradition that seem to contribute towards violence, abuse and oppression of women.

The study also seek to establish alternative evangelical theological discourses and resources to counteract violence against women.

## **1.2 Research discussion: Hypothesis, the research problem and key questions**

The nature of this study has identified two hypotheses/premises which guides its major theological arguments and reflection as follows:

1. The most effective way to theologically reflect on domestic violence, abuse and oppression of women in South Africa is to explore how God has been imaged as "male" and its resultant male paradigms of power and domination which is present in evangelical theology and church tradition.
2. The alternative evangelical theological discourses and resources for transformation can only be achieved by exposing the nature of the distorted perceptions of the image of God as male in evangelical theology on the one hand, and its influence on domestic violence, abuse and oppression of women on the other hand.

The statement of the research problem for this study based on the hypotheses above is:

Have discourses on the notion of how we image God as male possibly influenced abuse, domestic violence and oppression of women among partners within the evangelical context in South Africa?

In attempting to answer the above research question, this study has addressed the following sub-questions: -

1. What are some of the predominant social, religious and cultural discourses on the notion of the image of God and "*maleness*" within the context of evangelical Christians in the FGC in Phoenix, Durban?
2. How do the expressions of the evangelical theology portrayed in these discourses of "*maleness*" connected to domestic violence, abuse and oppression of women within the evangelical context of this FGC?
3. To what extent do some of the expressions of evangelical theology observed in the case study of the FGC in Phoenix, Durban reflect the general nature of the evangelical theology in South Africa?
4. What are the alternative evangelical theological discourses and resources for transformation pertinent in counteracting social and religious cultures of domestic

violence, abuse and oppression on women within the evangelical tradition in South Africa?

### 1.3 The research objectives

The objectives of this study therefore are: -

1. To examine the social, religious and cultural discourses on the notion of the image of God as male and its possible influence on violence, abuse and oppression of women.
2. To examine whether the concepts of the image of God as male has possibly influenced gender socialisation, cultural and religious beliefs and its possible connection to domestic violence, abuse and oppression of women among evangelicals in South Africa.
3. To examine how the various expressions of evangelical theology lead to a misunderstanding of the concept of the image of God and its possible results in dehumanising women.
4. To examine the impression that Christianity and its use of the bible could be the major cause of patriarchy and oppressive structures against women, whether directly or indirectly.
5. To foster a theological reflection that will seek alternative evangelical theological resources for transformation to counteract rather than continuing the culture of violence, abuse and oppression against women within the evangelical tradition.

### 1.4 Preliminary Literature review

Domestic violence refers to all kinds of violence that occurs at the level of intimate relationships. Much research<sup>5</sup> has been done within the scope of gender-based abuse and domestic violence from a sociological, developmental and health perspective. However, few of them have focused on a *theological reflection* that engages the social, religious and cultural discourses on the notions of the image of God—“maleness” (how we imagine God as “male”) and the possible influence this has on DV, abuse and oppression of women in South Africa. This is the gap that this study has addressed.

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<sup>5</sup> Such work include: - Dlamini, Nompumelelo P. 2005 Zulu Women, Domestic Violence and Christian Faith: Does the church help or hinder the survivors? M Th. Thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg; Phiri, Isabel A. 2002. “Why Does God allow our Husbands to Hurt us?” Overcoming Violence Against Women. In: *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*. No. 114 (November), Pp. 19-30; Buckenham, Karen 1999. *Violence Against Women: A Resource Manual for the Church In South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: PACSA; Maluleke, Tinyiko S. and Nadar Sarojini 2002. Breaking the covenant of Violence against Women. In: *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*. No. 114. (November). Pgs.5-18; Oduyoye, Mercy A. 1995. “Violence against Women: Window on Africa,” *Voices Form The Third World—EATWOT Women Theologians on Violence Against Women*. Vol. 18. No. 1. Pp 168-176.

A thorough Systematic theological reflection on this area of study is therefore deemed necessary. The literature review on this study was centred on three major areas: - (1.4.1) A section on literature portraying some expressions of evangelical theology and abuse, (1.4.2) How discourses on the image of God in evangelical theology possibly influences notions on "maleness" and its contribution to domestic violence, abuse and oppression of women and (1.4.3) Literature on alternative evangelical theological discourses and resources for transformation.

#### **1.4.1 Literature portraying some expressions of evangelical theology and abuse**

Ascertaining the major notions that image God as male in some expressions of evangelical theology with possible influence on violence, abuse and oppression of women is an integral undertaking of this study. Some of the expressions of evangelical theology have been identified in a number of theological emphasis that evangelicals have shown in certain doctrinal teachings and statements of faith. For instance, discourses on the interpretation of scriptures have been examined to explore the hermeneutical process within the evangelical tradition and how this contributes to oppressive ideologies against women among the evangelicals. It is observed that the subordinate position of women under male authority is as a result of the position that evangelicals have taken in strongly interpreting that God is "male." Chapter four seeks to ascertain how such interpretation influences men to model themselves after God's representation of *maleness* and eventually act violently through abusive behaviors while assuming that they take the superior position for God. Phiri's argument on the belief that God intended men to dominate and women to submit (2001:98) is an indication that leads to interpretation of Scripture among some evangelicals. This therefore brings to surface the ancient question of the humanity of women. Even though the theology of "female-male equality" has been preached by most evangelicals for decades now, the practicability of this has not been achieved. Ackermann (1991:93-105), looking at the humanity of women and the image of God and how this correlates to abuse and violence against women observes that this has contributed to the invisibility of women categorizing them as "sinful Eves."

The hermeneutical method among some evangelicals has also influenced the expressions of "maleness" observed in the theologies of "male headship," "male priesthood" and "wife submission" in intimate relationships. Phiri (2001:98) asserts: "patriarchy as a social organization and a set of beliefs grants and sustains male dominance over women and children." It is therefore evident that the ideology that women are to submit to men and that men are "priests" in the home, if misused by men could lead to abusive cultures

of violence and oppression of women among partners within the evangelical contexts. Cochrane in her book *Evangelical Feminism* (2002:115) emphatically states that the question of whether women should be subordinate to the spiritual authority of men is ultimately a theological issue, not simply a women's issue. She further argues that androcentrism in the church begins with the concept of a male God, who rules in a patriarchal, authoritarian manner over his creation (:111). It is therefore argued that our theology regarding the position of women in marriage, at the church or in the society has been influenced chiefly by the interpretation of Scripture that we take.

The evangelical interpretation further portrays expressions of evangelical theology on notions of the cross, Christian suffering and forgiveness. These have been examined to determine their possible influence on violence, abuse and oppression of women among intimates within the evangelical context. Buckenham indicates that victims of abuse and violence attach suffering as part of God's plan for their lives (1999:102). Phiri further states that women in abusive relationships accepted abuse from their husbands as sharing in Christ's suffering (2001:97, 99). The urgency for women to forgive their abusive violent husbands while remaining in abusive marriages is also an expression of evangelical theology that needs to be examined as Heggen has argued (In Phiri 2001:99). Notably, these are clear indications that evangelical interpretation of Scripture has not been innocent in regards to predominant discourses that portray expressions of evangelical theology. These expressions, I suggest, has notions of *maleness* as its central concern that could influence abuse and violence against women in one way or the other.

#### **1.4.2 Literature on the image of God as male and its influence on violence, abuse and oppression on women**

One of the fundamental concerns in the history of Christian theology since its inception has been that of woman and man created in God's image. We are therefore faced with a theological issue of Christian anthropology that centers on whether God is a male or a female. As a result, this has enormous implications on shaping the relationships between female and male within religious spheres of life having great impact on the cultural and social orientations. For instance, we see this in the theology of the early church fathers such as Augustine of Hippo whose theology on woman symbolises the lower orientation of the mind because of her assumed weakened intellectual powers. Hence, he concluded that women are incapable of reflecting the image of God on their own compared to men (Gonzalez 2007:37-38).

It is from such that scholars such as Cooper-White asserts; "The way we image our God has everything to do with the way we image our relationships with each other" (1995:40). According to her observation these have far-reaching consequences for the perpetuation of violence. She insists that we have created God in our own image, resulting in a top-bottom pyramid of power hierarchy. Schussler-Fiorenza suggests that such a perception creates a cultural-religious understanding that a woman is nothing without a man (1996:45).

Such arguments imply that theological assumptions have been influenced by certain socio-cultural norms that affect how Christian women and men relate to each other and this constructs societal systems and structures. *Maleness* is therefore apparent at the heart of patriarchy and unfortunately, our imagination of a male God has a huge role in contributing to our theological postulation that consciously or unconsciously dehumanises women. Commenting on the wide spread of violence on women in Africa, Oduyoye's literature accentuates that socio-cultural norms generally demand submissive and subordinate behavior of women and this, in turn, makes them accept the violence done to them (1995:164).

### **1.4.3 Literature on alternative evangelical theological discourses and resources for transformation**

The theological reflection engaged critiques the dominant discourses that portray some expressions of evangelical theology. The purpose is to explore alternative evangelical theological discourses and resources for transformation. Various scholars have indicated the need for change and transformation (see chapter seven on: The need for alternative theological discourses and resources for transformation). However, Maluleke and Nadar in their Article—"Breaking the Covenant of Violence against Women" (2002:15-16) have extensively expressed the need for serious alternatives for the violence that women are exposed to in the South African society. They assert that what we need are deconstructive and counter-strategies from within culture and religion. "For Christians," they state, "such strategies and structures would include counter-acting both the *abuse* and the *use* of the Bible and other Christian teachings and practices in justifying and perpetuating the oppression of women" (:16). They have suggested that an important source of deconstructive counter-cultural strategies for Christians is the practice of Jesus Christ—whose obedience to God included a critique of many prevailing cultural and religious practices of his day.

## 1.5 Theoretical framework

The study has engaged an interdisciplinary approach that has involved social, theological, religious and a cultural analytical approach. This has been applied within a feminist theoretical framework which has specifically focused on the *feminist theology of praxis*.<sup>6</sup> This feminist perspective of doing theology embraces the concept of “*mending of creation*” that takes a critical view on transformation.

Firstly, this framework has been applied in this study seeking for the “mending of creation” in relation to the humanity of women as the oppressed while addressing issues of inequality among partners that influence abuse, violence and oppression. Secondly, this theoretical framework has been adopted with a purpose of exploring its propensity of deconstruction and reconstruction theologies.<sup>7</sup> It is hereby argued that there is a need to deconstruct the social, religious and cultural ideologies, theologies, and societal norms that emphasises inequality between female and male. It is only until deconstruction and reconstruction is achieved that transformation becomes evident. It is only then that alternative theologies can be recreated. Oduyoye states: “Like other liberation theologians, we join in the analysis, deconstruction, construction, and advocacy that will bring healing and transformation to our communities” (1996:112). Thirdly, this framework has been used to highlight and examine some expressions of evangelical theology on discourses of interpretation and *maleness*, discourses on marriage and discourses on Christian suffering and forgiveness.

## 1.6 Research design and methodology

### 1.6.1 Research method

The study has utilised a *theological reflection* as its method. Theological reflection as a methodology calls into account a historical, sociological and hermeneutical dialogue. Theology aims at an understanding of faith that is ultimately practical. Christian theologians therefore have believed that the past holds important keys to understanding the present. From their critical analysis, Evelyn and James Whitehead (1980:1-7) asserts that a theological reflection is the process by which a community of faith correlates the relevant religious information from three sources, namely: Christian tradition, the

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<sup>6</sup> An elaborate discussion on this framework is in chapter two of this study.

<sup>7</sup> Mugambi (1995), *From Liberation to Reconstruction*. In this, Mugambi proposed a theological paradigm shift from liberation theology to reconstruction theology. This aims at social transformation that emphasizes Personal reconstruction, Ecclesial reconstruction and Cultural reconstruction after the Cold war within the New World Order. The concepts of this paradigm will be utilized in this study engaged towards the need for alternative theologies and resources for transformation.

experience of the community of faith and the resources of the culture, in pursuit of insight that will illuminate and shape (a pastoral)—in this case, a theological activity or (praxis). This approach points to the three sources of religious information as a model in theological reflection.<sup>8</sup>

This methodology therefore indicates that this study is a non-empirical analysis of existing data. The primary method of data collection has involved an extensive literature review on the subject of study. However, a case study on a research conducted on domestic violence in a FGC in Durban has been used to draw out some expressions of evangelical theology. The research is descriptive and exploratory as well. This has brought into dialogue discourses of *maleness* portrayed as expressions of evangelical theology and its possible influence on abuse and oppression of women among partners (Durrheim 2006).

### **1.6.2 The significance of the research and its limitations**

The study has used *theological reflection* as its methodology based on literature review. However, the discourses have been informed by the case study adopted on the research done on “*Domestic violence in Christian Homes, a Durban Case Study* (DCS); (Phiri 2001), of the FGC in Phoenix within the South African context. Even though other literature in this area of interest has been examined as well, this study is limited in its findings. The findings and the claims in this dissertation are therefore tentative and require further empirical research to investigate the conclusions arrived at. The challenge to its methodology is to determine the extent at which the expressions of evangelical theology observed in the FGC in Phoenix reflect the general situation of the evangelical theology in South Africa.

### **1.6.3 The research ethics**

Although this is a non-empirical study, the ethics of research as required by the University of KwaZulu-Natal has been upheld. The study has been conducted with

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<sup>8</sup> The Evelyn and James Whitehead (1980:1-7) observes that the initial stage of a theological reflection is **attending**. This involves seeking out the diverse information residing often in a partly-hidden fashion, in the religious Tradition, the culture, and the personal experience. In this research, this has involved a theological inquiry that examines the evangelical interpretation of scriptures, an examination of the church father’s influence on the evangelical tradition on their theological position on the image of God and the humanity of women. The intermediate stage is **insertion** (a style of behavior which acknowledges the value of human needs/context and convictions in a manner that respects the needs and convictions of others). It is upon this stage that this research takes a thorough theological reflection that seeks to engage the expressions of abusive and oppressive theologies that dehumanize women and men. This therefore has instigated a dialogue among the three sources of information in order to clarify and challenge them. Evelyn and James Whitehead observe that the last stage in a theological reflection must be one of **decision**. This moves the reflection from insight towards practical and corporate action. In this particular research, this stage of my engagement focuses on proposing alternative evangelical theological discourses and resources for transformation that will empower women and men.

honesty and integrity based on secondary data. The works of other people have been acknowledged accordingly so as to avoid plagiarism. The research has been conducted in a conscientiously sensitive way because of the possible impacts that it could wield on the society and the academic circles through information dissemination, publication and/or otherwise. Since the academy of African theology is in the growing process, this study proves academically beneficial through its contribution to sociology, religion and theology.

#### **1.6.4 The overall structure of the dissertation**

This study is divided into eight chapters.

Chapter One as an introduction of the study presents the background information to the research. It frames the research question, methodology and makes the case for the relevance and the significance of the research. The research argues that the predominant social, religious and cultural discourses portray some expressions of evangelical theology that has possible influence on DV, abuse and oppression against women especially within the evangelical context in South African.

Against this backdrop, Chapter Two gives a detailed theoretical framework under which the study is conducted. It elaborates on a *feminist theology of praxis* as a theological concept within the framework of feminist theology that explores the model of "mending of creation" as liberation praxis. This lays a ground work that leads to understanding DV, abuse and oppression of women within the evangelical context of South Africa in Chapter Three. Here, I examine the interdisciplinary discourses of social science, religion and culture in analysing the social context of violence, abuse and oppression of women among the evangelicals in South Africa. The theological observations are based on the FGC in Phoenix, Durban.

In Chapter Four I examine the expressions of evangelical theology in discourses of Scripture interpretation. The chapter has focused particularly on problematic theological and biblical interpretations that have imaged God as "male" hence describing "*maleness*" as a "divine norm." The interrelationship between the captivity of Christianity to patriarchy and its theological justifications that influences discourses on women as "inferior" and "lesser human beings" have been examined. The influence of the evangelical interpretation on the humanity of women has been explored and its contribution to the various expressions of evangelical theological discourses influencing violence, abuse and oppression of women is established.

Based on the interpretation of Scriptures, Chapter Five examines the expressions of evangelical theology in discourses of marriage. The chapter explores the social, religious and cultural discourses that foster theologies of male headship, authority, and male priesthood in the home and in marriage. Theology of submission is also addressed in detail examining how these have possible influence on violence, abuse and oppression of women among intimates.

Chapter Six continues to examine the expressions of evangelical theology in discourses of the cross, Christian suffering and forgiveness. A theological reflection on the discourses of suffering and notions on forgiveness as expressions of evangelical theology that have possible influence to contribute to violence, oppression and abuse of women among intimates within the evangelical context are analysed.

Since there can be no adequate Christian reflection without praxis I finally, in Chapter Seven, explore proposals for alternative evangelical discourses and resources for transformation. The chapter reflects on the possible evangelical theological discourses and resources for transformation that could counteract abusive expressions of evangelical theologies offering practical suggestions for praxis/action. Having looked at the possible alternative paradigms for transformation, Chapter Eight as the Epilogue draws an evaluation of each chapter offering concrete proposals and recommendations.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter has extensively looked at the structural overview of this entire study, giving an in-depth descriptive synopsis of the study. The chapter as an introduction has given the background of the study, the research discussion elaborating on the premise, the hypothesis, the research problem, the key questions and the objectives of the study. A thorough systematic presentation of the literature review on the proposed areas of concern in evangelical theology has been presented. The feminist theology of praxis as a theological framework for this study has been proposed with further elaboration to be done in chapter two. Lastly, the chapter has looked at the research design and methodology which has given the structure of the brief summary of the dissertation citing its limitations, its organization and its significance. This brings me to chapter two which is examining the proposed framework of *feminist theology of praxis* with the purpose of examining the context of violence, abuse and oppression of women in South Africa, and more specifically, to the evangelical context as the focus of this study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND ITS THEOLOGICAL CONCEPTS

*"The demasculinisation of God has often been interpreted as one of the hardest challenges of feminist theology to the church" (Kanyoro 1998:270).*

#### 2.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter I argued for the relevance of this study. The chapter indicated that imagining (imaging) God as male constructs ideologies of "maleness" that in turn have the capacity to contribute to a male paradigm of domination. At the same time, I argued that this has possible subsequent influence on male violence, abuse and oppression against women. I further argued that predominant discourses portray expressions of evangelical theology and that these require alternative evangelical theologies, discourses and resources for transformation that will counteract those abusive and oppressive expressions. In this chapter I elaborate on the *feminist theology of praxis* as a theoretical framework adopted for this study. The chapter looks at the theological concepts that have influenced my analytical position to critique the predominant discourses that portray expressions of evangelical theology. This framework also has informed my methodology of a theological reflection in relation to the need for transformative praxis against abuse and oppression that women are encountering among evangelicals. This chapter therefore defines feminism(s) and feminist theology, argues for the appropriateness of a *feminist theology of praxis* as a theoretical framework and cites it as a liberation praxis that focuses on a new creation through the theological concept of "mending of creation."

#### 2.1 The appropriate feminist theoretical framework for the study

King (1995:19) rightly argues that in the study of religion and gender, two fundamental problems arise for feminist scholars. One, she states: "has to do with the subject matter of the research," the other "with the attitude of the research." These two aspects have been of great concern to me in the exploration for an appropriate theoretical framework and a theological concept. It is clearly noted that most religious phenomena as King asserts, even when studied by women, still remain set in the context of an andocentric framework which defines our intellectual task in the very effort of deconstruction and construction (:19). With this caution in mind, this study deemed it appropriate to apply a *feminist theology of praxis* as a theoretical concept within the feminist theological framework.

*Feminist theology of praxis* is a theological concept coined by Ackermann that emphasises translating theological theories into practices for people of faith (in Klein 2004:45). Klein indicates that Ackermann uses the word *praxis* alongside feminist theology to mean a practice that has been informed by theory that has been reflected on (:45). In other words, according to Ackermann's understanding, *praxis* means what she believes and her actions about what she believes are inseparable (:51). She insists that what she believes and she theorise about has to find feet in praxis, stating:

"What we do about what we believe is the ultimate test of the veracity of our beliefs. We are called to be present and active in this world. We are, in some or other awesome way, the tools with which God is accomplishing what must be done in this world. Thus, Christian practices are both normative and theological" (Ackermann in Klein 2004:45).

In her separate article: "*Engaging freedom: A contextual feminist theology of praxis*" (1996:33), Ackermann argues that a *feminist theology of praxis* has the notion of "liberating praxis" as its central concern. It is therefore critical, committed, constructive, collaborative and accountable reflection on the theories of and praxis of struggle and hope for the "*mending of creation*" based on the stories and experiences of women/marginalized and oppressed people (:34).

My attraction to a *feminist theology of praxis* as an approach of feminist work for the purpose of this study is firstly from its appealing commitment for change that can only be achieved through involvement in Christian practices of some sort. I contend that a thorough praxis geared for change and transformation has been a missing factor in most work that have addressed gender violence especially those that involve abuse and oppression by men against women among evangelicals. Abuse and violence against women can be addressed as a "crime" that demands legal actions taken against the perpetrators (I have no problem with that), but equally I believe that it is imperative to theologially not only theorise and reflect but engage structures and abusive male attitudes and theological ideologies among evangelical Christians. It is time that evangelicals should confront the sin of abuse and oppression of women and this requires praxis. As I undertake the task of addressing this subject from an evangelical perspective I concur with Ackermann that if we separate theological theory from theological praxis, all we end up with is an "intellectual armchair" enterprise (in Klein 2004:51). Further, my concern about abused and oppressed women within the evangelical context places "liberating praxis"<sup>9</sup> first in my theological agenda. I observe with Ackermann that liberation has to be all encompassing and profound, having

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<sup>9</sup> It is argued that theology that takes at its point of departure or incorporates a liberation perspective holds that only liberating praxis can offer both theological vision as well as the touchstone for such a vision. Liberating praxis is collaborative, sustained action for justice, liberation and healing, empowered by continuous struggle, hope and passion (Ackermann 1996:34).

everything to do with theological theory and theological praxis (in Klein 2004:51). Hence, practice must come first. It is to this fact that she states, "Christian practices must address fundamental human needs and conditions. They have everything to do with temporality, with the body, with language, with relationships, with mortality" (:45). Ackermann further suggests that this is what the life of Christ was about and I believe that this is what my theological reflection as an evangelical must involve.

Secondly, the *feminist theology of praxis* has an emphasis in the concept of "*mending of creation*" (Ackermann 1996:47). Shaped by Russell in her book "*The Future of Partnership*" (1979), the entire focus on this concept looks at the meaning of partnership in the context of a *new creation*. According to Russell, a focus on a new creation is where we partner with God in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as an unexpected solidarity between creator and creature participating in the divine plan for all creation (1979:22). She argues that:

"God as creator continues to bring life to the world and humanity and invites us to share in the re-creation of human wholeness. We ourselves are involved in God's economics. We are commissioned to share in the work of the economic Trinity: the work of caring for creation, setting the captives free and standing as a witness for and with those who need an advocate" (:34).

What manner of mission (praxis) this is that we partner with God's action for transformation towards a new creation that is achieved through mending of creation? It is to this task, I suppose, that we are called as evangelicals. Violence, abuse and oppression of women require a re-creation of women's identity, humanity, dignity, value, worth and place in church and society. The *mending of creation* in particular as Ackermann (1996:47) stresses, takes a critical view on transforming human relationships with ourselves, with one another, with God and with the environment through actions of justice, freedom, as well as changing those societal structures which perpetuate economic, political and social separateness among people. Hence, the focus encompasses its emphasis on the theo-ethical significance of values such as equality, love, wholeness and peace, the flourishing of righteousness, all which foster good relations between and among people and justice that lies at the heart of a mended creation (:47).

The experiences of violence, abuse and oppression constructed by the male social, religious and cultural paradigms against women among partners calls not only for a deconstruction and a theological reconstruction. Liberating praxis which is an intentional *practical* engagement must take great interest in mending human creation and relationships with a purpose of transformation. It is hereby argued that emancipation comes when mending takes place. May be as evangelicals we need to "mend" men first

before women can attain emancipation. As part of God's creation, the humanity and the place of women in both private and public space is one that requires mending and must continue as vital not only as a feminist work but also as the option of the church for the oppressed. In her "*new way of doing theology*," Rakoczy suggests that the final step of a feminist methodology must be the most creative one since the challenge is to construct and formulate the teaching of Christianity. It is not a matter of "add a few women and stir them into history." No, a whole new way of thinking and expressing the Christian tradition is the agenda (2004:18). Therefore, it is clearly observed that it is upon such a liberating praxis that the "mending of creation" takes place. The feminist theology of praxis suggests therefore that liberation theology must begin from engaged action (Christian practices of people of faith) and lead to continuing transformative action with an intention of mending.<sup>10</sup>

### **2.1.1 Definition of feminism(s) and feminist theology**

The term "feminism" has many different uses and its meanings may differ in different contexts. Although the term "feminism" has a history in the English linked with women's activism from the late 19th century to the present (Rakoczy 2004:12-13), it is vital to distinguish between Christian feminist ideas or beliefs and those of feminist political movements.

Haddad argues that attempting to define feminism is a complex process. According to her understanding, there are many "feminisms," as has been noted by other scholars, each located within particular contexts and particular movements in history taking many forms and named differently by women themselves (2000:142). However, feminism must first be understood as an academic analysis being used virtually in every discipline as a method of social vision seeking liberation of women from all forms of *sexism* (2005:16). Haddad defines feminism understood as to be an "awareness of women's oppression on domestic, social, economic and political levels, accompanied by a willingness to struggle against such oppression" (:142). Rakoczy asserts that the critical principle of feminism, and thus of feminist theology, "is the promotion of the full humanity of women" (2004:15). Citing Elizabeth Johnson, she insists that "Whatever enables this (women's full humanity) to flourish is redemptive and of God; whatever damages this is non-redemptive and contrary to God's intent" (:15).

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<sup>10</sup> The transformative action of the feminist theology of praxis ties with the *reconstructionist Christian feminist theology* which seeks a liberating theological core for women in Christian tradition, while also envisioning a deeper transformation, not only of the church structures but also of civil society as Rakoczy (2004:17) observes.

Wieringa defines feminism as a discursive process, a process producing meaning of subverting representations of gender and re-creating new representations of gender, womanhood, of identity and collective self (1995:5). She argues that as such, feminism carries multiple meanings, limited neither to recent movements, nor in public outbursts and in struggles in the private domain, for these private struggles are always expressions of the external collective process. This implies that the private (hidden) domain constructs the public and needs to be addressed with equal stress and struggle. As this study indicates, women are engaged in hidden (private) forms of cultural and social violence and abuse among partners and the struggle against oppression must be based on the conviction that the full humanity of women matters to God whether in the private or in the public sphere. Praxis therefore requires equal attention towards the private domain and the public domain. My contention is that we are in a better position to influence and transform the "political" (outside) if ideologies that govern relations in the private are mended.

When the issues of feminism are reflected from a theological perspective, the end product is feminist theology, of which Christian feminist theology is an example. Women's experiences therefore become an important informative source of doing theology. Rakoczy notes that because feminist theology is part of the family of liberation theologies, it begins with the experiences of women's oppression and how gender has been constructed in society (2004:15). It is at this point that Wolksi-Conn's definition of feminism could be helpful with particular reference to the ways in which oppression of women must be viewed as a gender construction. She states, "Feminism is both a coordinated set of ideas and a practical plan of action rooted in women's critical awareness of how a culture controlled in meaning and action by men, for their own advantage, oppresses women and dehumanizes men" (Quoted in Clifford 2005:17). Feminist theology therefore has two major tasks: to deconstruct and critique the male cultural paradigms in theological thought and to construct and formulate new perspectives (Rakoczy 2004:17).<sup>11</sup> To achieve this task of deconstructing and constructing *praxis* is vital and this requires practical plan of action against oppression.

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<sup>11</sup> Clifford distinguishes three type of feminist theology. **Revolutionary feminist theology** as a post-Christian response to the patriarchy in Christian tradition. She notes that the concern of this group is their major problem with Christianity being the centrality given to the revelation of a male God, whom they believe is used to legitimate the patriarchal oppression of women by Christian churches and the subordination of women in marital relationships. The second type is the **Reformist Christian feminist theology**. This group, as Clifford notes, seeks not for total revolutionized Christianity but they look for more modest changes within the existing church structures such as the inclusion of women in church structures. The third type is the **Reconstructionist Christian feminist theology** who holds the same commitment to Christianity as the reformist feminism but they seek a liberating theological core for women within the Christian tradition while also envisioning a deeper transformation, a true reconstruction, not only for their church structures but also of civil society (2005:32-37).

### 2.1.2 Feminist theology: A concern in African Christian theology

African women theologians in their struggle to broaden the theoretical framework and the basis of their work observe that the Anglophone region have been reluctant to explicitly naming their work feminist (Phiri and Nadar 2006:6). Certain scholars have made numerous observations on the exclusion of women from active theological engagement within the academy of African theology.<sup>12</sup> It is therefore clear that there is a need for African women to participate in the ongoing work of feminist theology with an aim of bringing their theological concerns to the fore. Parratt (1997:2) argues that African theology is "Christian theology as done by Africans." However, African Christian Theology has been framed by Nyamiti who argues that:

"In its broad sense, African Christian Theology can be defined as the understanding and expression of the Christian faith and Gospel of Jesus Christ in according with African needs. In its narrow or strict sense, African Christian Theology is the systematic or scientific presentation or elaboration of the Christian faith according to the needs and mentality of African people" (Quoted in Mpagi 2002:35).

African Women's theology<sup>13</sup> as a strand of African Christian theology is multidisciplinary in nature and addresses issues that women face from social, cultural and religious perspectives. Phiri argues that although African theology emphasises the contextualization of the Christian gospel into the African culture, African women's issues are left out. She contends that the assumption is that women's experiences of God are the same as men's (1997:47). She further stresses that:

"It has now become the responsibility of African women to make it clear that although we live on the same continent, the experiences of women in religion and culture in Africa are different from those of men" (:47).

It is to this truth that African women theologians have engaged in the struggle for true humanity of women against all manner of oppressions be it political, economical or social including those that are ecclesiological and cultural. The struggle of true identity of persons as human has been a focal Christian struggle for the dignity of all men and women in Africa on the belief that all are in the image of God. This is seen since the inception and throughout the history and progressive development of African theology in its concerns for *adaptation* and *inculturation* theologies, Black liberation and Liberation

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<sup>12</sup> (Phiri 1997:47; Rakoczy 2004:20).

<sup>13</sup> An extremely significant period in the development of African Women's Theology, Rakoczy suggests, began with the establishment of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (the "Circle") at Trinity College, Accra, Ghana in 1989. The Circle includes African women representing all the major religions of Africa embracing all women of Africa, regardless of colour (2004:22). Phiri and Nadar stress that the Circle is an important space for women from Africa to do communal theology based on their religious, cultural and social experiences.

theologies later. The question that still remains unanswered is why this struggle has left the subordination of women unattended especially by men theologians? This clearly indicates to us the deep rooted attitudes and ideologies from which theologies have been shaped in relation to the position of women in the African society. This begs attention and if possible our praxis must also address to change our theological theory as evangelicals, a process that calls theologians the need to engage in *liberation of theology*—a description used by Juan Luis Segundo and stressed by Russell (1979:166). The experiences of oppression by women are thus a vital aspect of concern among Circle theologians and women in Africa in the context of African Christian theology. Hence, African Women's theologies are a liberating theology. Oduyoye emphatically calls to attention that the contribution expected from African Women's theology is a challenge to theology in general since it seeks for liberation and transformation of oppressive structures (2001:8). As a narrative theology, Oduyoye contends that African Women's Theology should in fact be termed as "theologies." Phiri and Nadar (2006:6) argue that as concerned women, the Circle is continuously engaged in theological dialogue with cultures, religions, sacred writings and oral stories that shape the African context and define the women of the African continent. With a developing cultural hermeneutics, Oduyoye argues that this theology boldly criticises what is oppressive while advocating for what is liberative not only for women but for the whole community (2001:17). This has brought about the development of a "hermeneutics of suspicion" against the layers of patriarchal interpretation of religion and society among African women scholars. The concern that still needs to be addressed is, what is the way forward for African women's theologies in relation to a faith commitment for transformative praxis? How can theological theory on African women's theology be better influenced by theological praxis that intends to bring transformation in a context of DV and abuse by men against women?

## **Conclusion.**

The chapter has broadly looked at feminist theology as a framework identifying *feminist theology of praxis* as an appropriate theological concept that the study has used. It is within such an established framework that the subject of DV, abuse and oppression of women has been addressed through liberative praxis which is not only deconstructive and reconstructive but also engages transformative actions. The feminist theology of praxis has also employed the concept of *mending of creation* which envisions a new creation through our partnership with God as creator in mending relations. The next chapter looks at DV and abuse of women among evangelicals in South Africa.

## CHAPTER THREE

### UNDERSTANDING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE OF WOMEN WITHIN THE EVANGELICAL CONTEXT IN SOUTH AFRICA

#### 3.0 Introduction

Having established the theoretical framework under which the study addresses issues of violence, abuse and oppression of women in relation to social, cultural and religious discourses, I now move on to examining the social reality of DV, and abuse within the evangelical<sup>14</sup> context in South Africa. The pervasiveness and cruelty of violence and abuse against women resoundingly confirm the reality of the continued dominated state of women in practically all countries worldwide including South Africa. Violence against women has therefore become an element of life for almost all women in all countries revolving within cultural, religious and social differences. Mtintso asserts; "Until women can become full and active participants in South African civil society, there can be no democracy and until we can effectively eliminate violence against women, women cannot fully participate in civil life" (Quoted in Dangor et al 2000:9). In this chapter I seek to establish the social reality of domestic violence and abuse of women as a problem in South Africa. The chapter looks at the definition of domestic violence and other terminologies applied to this phenomenon, the nature and the forms of domestic violence among partners within an evangelical context. The chapter also introduces the DCS of the FGC in Phoenix as an evangelical church with a Pentecostal tradition. This case study has facilitated theological observations portrayed as expressions of evangelical theology in this study.

#### 3.1 Preliminary observations

Domestic violence has increasingly been recognized as a serious problem. Even so, it has been argued that violence by men against women within the safe havens of the home is a tragedy which has occurred throughout history. Mooney (2000:66) argues that women have always suffered violence from their husbands or partners. With this kind of observation, one is able to deduce that the home has increasingly become more dangerous than the streets for women, yet it should be the safest. Even so, if not feminist theologians, very few seem to be concerned about the normalised violence of partners against women. Such historical assertions as by Mooney should challenge

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<sup>14</sup> See chapter four for the definition of evangelical, evangelicalism, evangelical theology and tradition in details.

theologians to engage a better world for women. This indicates that a theological reflection is vital in examining Christian theology and tradition in order to earth out some traditional attitudes and ideologies about women that cause oppression.

The World Bank estimated that at a global level, the damage and cost to health from VAW aged 15-44 years is comparable to that posed by other risk factors and diseases already high on the world agenda, including AIDS (Soul City 1999:6). Tanzer and Fedler notes that violence is facilitated by and reinforces gender inequality within the society and in most socio-cultural contexts. Violence and abuse of women is also supported by various cultural, traditional and religious practices within the society (2000:21). Hence, a series of social, religious and cultural questions need to be raised with the purpose of engaging a theological reflection that seeks to address issues on *maleness* in relation to domestic violence, abuse and oppression of women among partners.

### **3.2 An overview of domestic violence against women in South Africa**

Gender-based violence in South Africa takes many different forms ranging from violence that occurs among partners to violence that occurs at various levels of public spheres, across all socio-economic, ethical and racial groups. In recent years, statistics indicates that wife battery and other forms of gender-based violence is both widespread and on the increase.<sup>15</sup> Research on violence against women in South Africa indicates that acts of violence overwhelmingly experienced by South African women include; sexual harassment, rape, domestic violence, particular kinds of murder such as witch burning, rape-murders, sexual serial killings and intimate femicide<sup>16</sup> (Soul City 1999:7). Swart (2005:39) quotes an article in The Sunday Tribune in March 2004 that highlights the Interpol figures. This survey confirms South Africa as one of the most murderous non-warring countries in the world. Concurring with Vetten's observation, Swart argues that research by the MRC and the CSVR at the University of Cape Town, has found that South

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<sup>15</sup> According to some latest statistics, the largest percentages of violent crimes are experienced by women living in the Western Cape, Gauteng, and the Free State provinces. Almost half (48%) of sexual offences and assaults take place inside private dwellings. It is further estimated that one in every four South African women or 25% is assaulted by a boyfriend or a husband every week. Violence against women is cited in more than a third of the divorce cases in South Africa (Van der Haven 2001:127). Vetten observes that a study undertaken with a sample of 168 women drawn from 15 rural communities in Southern Cape, estimated that an average of 80% of rural women are victims of domestic violence. Interviews conducted with 1 394 men working for three Cape Town municipalities found that approximately 44% of the men were willing to admit that they abused their female partners (2005:2). These figures indicate that domestic violence is a very serious social problem in South Africa.

<sup>16</sup> **Femicide** is the killing of women by intimate or estranged male partners. Buckenham argues that the term is used in order to make it clear that murder is not "gender neutral." When women are murdered, their femaleness is usually a key component of the crime. She further observes that women are likely to be murdered by male intimates and less frequently by strangers (1999:20). National figures for intimate femicide suggest that this most lethal form of domestic violence is prevalent in South Africa. In 1999 8.8 per 100 000 of the female population aged 14 years and older died at the hands of their partners—the highest rate ever reported in research anywhere in the world (Mathew's et al Quoted in Vetten 2005:2).

Africa has the highest incidence of intimate femicide in the world. Statistics indicated that one woman is killed by her partner (husband or boyfriend) every six hours (Swart 2005:40). McCue asserts that half (50%) of the women who die from homicides in South Africa are killed by either a current or former husband or partner. They die from burns, beatings, gun violence, and stabbings (2008:77). Forty to seventy percent of every three women will suffer some form of violence that includes physical and sexual attacks in her lifetime. (Schuele and Berner-Rodoreda 2009:9). South African women's organizations estimated that perhaps as many as one in every three South African women will be raped and one in six South African women is in an abusive domestic relationship (Buckenham 1999:15). Depending on how police records are interpreted, arguments range over whether an adult rape<sup>17</sup> is committed every 36 seconds, or every 11 seconds or every 4 seconds.

Following a study conducted by the Gender and Health Group of the MRC in 1998 in Mitchell's Plain, Cape Town, Fourie observes that 48% of the sample ( $n=412$ ) said they had been abused in the past and/or were being abused at the time of the research. Verbal abuse was most common, followed by emotional abuse, physical abuse, isolation, sexual abuse, and lastly, economic abuse (2004:252). She also notes that data from a 1998 study of women ( $N= 1,306$ ) from three South African provinces revealed that being beaten in childhood and witnessing a mother's abuse were important for women's perceptions and experiences of violence. This research also indicates that exposure to violence in childhood also influenced self-esteem, reducing the ability to leave potentially violent relationships (:252).

Looking at the reality of abuse and violence against women in the South African context from an evangelical perspective could indicate that oppression is more pronounced in the community out there and it is because of the influence of the secular non-Christian cultures. Evangelicals therefore fail to see the evils within their community and how they are part of the problem in the general society. It is therefore vital to ask how evangelicals are contributing to the problem through their theology and traditions.

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<sup>17</sup> Buckenham states that rape is very common in South Africa and according to statistics at the time of her writing, South Africa had reported the highest number of rapes in the world and an estimated 15% increase per year based on the 52,160, 42,646 and 23,374 for January-June in 1997, 1998 and in 1999 respectively. She observes that rape is a crime and an act of violence, where sex is used as the weapon of control. In rape, a woman is desecrated as the perpetrator takes what he wants by force (1999:23-27). Further, it is suggested that rapes happen in trusting relationships not usually with strangers but usually happens to women and children by someone they know and trust. It is a terrible and terrifying violation of every aspect of a woman's being having effects such as torture, intense degradation, inability to trust, constant fear, psychological problems, anger and feelings of guilt and shame (:23). However, Vetten insists that the true extent of sexual violence in South Africa was unknown. She observes that StasSA found that 1 in 2 rape survivors reported being raped to the police while the MRC found that 1 in 9 women reported being raped. On the basis of such studies, Vetten (2005:2) suggests that it can be extrapolated that the 52 733 rapes reported by the SAPS in 2003/04 released data is more accurately calculated as falling somewhere between the region of 104 000 and 470 000 actual rapes having taken place. Sadly, Buckenham asserts that it is estimated that between 1 in 3 and 1 in 2 women or girls will be raped in her lifetime, and that most will know her attacker (1999:27).

### **3.2.1 Historical context of South Africa and its influence on violence against women**

South Africa has a multiracial and multicultural population. Its violent culture is seen by many as a legacy of apartheid.<sup>18</sup> Maluleke and Nadar insist that violence against women is written into the histories and cultures of the South African communities in structured and coherent ways (2002:13). They state that apartheid has been the backdrop out of which death, poverty and need flourished and as such, they were the seedbeds for vicious cycles and concentric circles of violence. They suggest that in them African patriarchy found fertile soil. Swart (2005:5) cites authors as Bennett (2000, 2005); Robertson (1998) and Vetten (1997) who elucidate the rise in gender violence in South Africa today and consider its violent history and the transition to democracy as possible influence. However, Swart further agrees with Vetten's suggestion that not all South African men experience transition as conflict-ridden and react with violence (2005:5). The HRW noted that there was "at least circumstantial evidence that those areas worst affected by the uprising against the state and by intercommunity political conflict are also those areas where reported rapes are highest" (Soul City 1999:27). For instance, Buckenham contends that rape was used as a tool for war, and was inflicted upon women during the liberation struggles in South Africa as a form of torture. Further, she argues that South Africa as a nation is therefore emerging from a destructive pattern of violence, both repressive and revolutionary, and in the process many South Africans have come to accept violence as an ordinary, normal and legitimate solution to conflict, even at the interpersonal level (Padayachee and Singh 1998:5). However, the historical context of violence in South Africa must not be used as an excuse to women oppression and abuse especially in the post-apartheid South Africa. The descriptions that relate political violence with abuse and oppression of women is justified but this must not be left unquestioned. This requires an examination of ideologies on *maleness* and its influence on abuse and violence in relation to social, cultural and religious beliefs.

### **3.2.2 Status of women in South Africa**

It is evident that the status of women in South Africa differs from society to society within the country and is shaped by social, religious and cultural/traditional values. Although gender equality is well spoken of and is especially established in legal statutes,

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<sup>18</sup> Tribal groups, including the San, Khoi-Khoi, Xhosa and Zulu, occupied the land when Dutch settlers arrived in 1652 and began colonizing. Britain took possession of the Cape Colony in 1814, ruling until South Africa became independent in 1910. Strong connections with Britain persisted through the Second World War, and a policy of racial separation called *Apartheid* was officially established in 1948. Racial segregation and discrimination resulted in significant disparities between Whites and Blacks. Racial tension gained momentum in the 1960s, intensifying political unrest. In 1991, Parliament scrapped the Apartheid laws, and a process of transformation started. The first multiracial democratic elections were held in 1994, after which a new constitution was adopted (Fourie 2004:246).

inequality between men and women prevails on social, religious and cultural spheres. Fourie argues that South Africa is liberal in the African context regarding the status of women yet women have a subordinate status and restricted autonomy in society (2004:248). She asserts that the experiences of women differ according to race and grouping, with black women the most disadvantaged by discrimination, poverty, fewer opportunities and low literacy rates. On certain levels of society, Fourie observes that women are viewed as equals, but stereotypical views of women as inferior to men and belonging to the domesticated role as wives and mothers, are common (:248).<sup>19</sup> Observing such literature about the South African context leaves me doubtful if any difference exists, for instance, on the status of women in the twenty first century South Africa and the status of women in any other epoch in history. Even though I could argue that things are changing (not much), the truth remains that there are similarities of social, religious and cultural status of women in our contemporary times with that of women in the recent past. Nothing much seems to have changed regarding the status of women in popular societies. This therefore should bring to the fore the nature of systems and structures that are deep rooted in our histories regarding the presupposed inferior and subordinate position of women in society. Most probably it goes without questioning that male dominance and patriarchy<sup>20</sup> has contributed enormously to the status of women in our societies.

### **3.2.3 The response of the South African government to violence and abuse of women**

Over the last decade, legislators have drawn attention to family and domestic violence. In 1998, the South African government adopted the Domestic Violence Bill, which described domestic violence as “any controlling or abusive behavior that harms the health, safety and well-being of any person” (Fourie 2004:249). The New legislation therefore came into force in South Africa in an attempt to combat the high levels of domestic violence as early as in 1999. The new domestic violence act is aimed at increasing the amount of help the police and courts can give to child and adult victims. However, as Fourie observes, even though an excellent Constitution is in place,

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<sup>19</sup> Fourie states that the status of women is further influenced by income. Because a higher percentage of men than women are the ones working, men are more likely to earn more money than their wives and have more control over the money. Therefore, women remain dependent on husbands and are likely to stay with their husbands despite abuse and violence that they experience. Fourie suggests that studies on the culture of sexual violence indicated that 40% of the men (2,059) had opinion that punishing their wife, through means such as physical violence, verbal abuse, controlling freedom, and withholding sex, was legitimate (2004:248). The majority of African women are influenced by a system of religious and customary law. For instance, the practice of *lobola* (bride price) is a traditional arrangement between families, in which the woman essentially becomes the property of her husband’s clan as Fourie (2004:248) elaborates.

<sup>20</sup> Rakoczy argues that patriarchy is an ideology, a way of thinking, feeling and organizing human life which legally, politically, socially and religiously enforces male dominance and power (2004:10).

accompanied by appropriate legislation, enforcing these laws has been a problem. According to her findings, *Die Burger* (a South African newspaper) reported that leading NGOs responsible for matters such as family violence believe the Domestic Violence Bill is not successful because police do not have the resources to apply the laws (Fourie 2004:250). Furthermore, cases are often withdrawn by victims out of fear either of the abusers or of emotional impact of prolonged trials (:250). From my understanding, there is no way that the South African government can fail to reinforce law against perpetrators of DV and abuse against women. It still boils down to the question of who are in authority in those specific legal positions and what are their attitudes regarding women who report case of violence and abuse. It is therefore not surprising if women hold back from pursuing legal help. It is difficult to expect that the same men who might be abusing their partners in the private sphere can take action against other men who are being accused of similar action. Very few, if not, none will be in that position. This still remains a complicated scenario because the systems are evident of male power that works against women in the form of patriarchal structures that look down upon women.

### **3.3 A case study on the Full Gospel Church in Phoenix, Durban: Domestic violence and abuse within the Evangelical context**

This section undertakes a process of theological observation made on domestic violence in Christian homes based on the DCS of the FGC in Phoenix.<sup>21</sup> The theological observations have assisted in inserting this study to a specific evangelical faith community drawing on its religious and cultural discourses on *maleness* and its influence on domestic violence. This has facilitated the examination of the predominant discourses that portray expressions of evangelical theology.

#### **3.3.1 Background information of the research done in Phoenix, Durban**

The FGC in Phoenix, Durban is situated in a former South African Indian neighbourhood (Phiri 2001:88). It is important to note that very little extensive academic research has been documented on the South African Indian Full Gospel Church as Nadar argues, apart from the work done by Oosthuizen (1976) and more recently Pillay (1994) (2003:205). Firstly, the five-hour workshop that Phiri organized in partnership with PASCA after the interviews she conducted mainly pulled participants who were predominantly South African Indian women (Phiri 2001:89). This sensitises me not only to be descriptive in

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<sup>21</sup> The particular literature referred to here is on a research conducted among couples of this church in 1999 by Isabel Phiri. Her intention was to investigate the pervasiveness of domestic violence and abuse between intimates within the evangelical context. The data collected and analyzed are as published in; Phiri, Isabel A. 2001. Domestic Violence in Christian Homes: A Durban Case Study. In: *Journal of the Study of Religion. Transition and Transformation in South Africa: Aspects of Women's Spirituality*. Vol. 14, No. 2. Pg. 85-101.

my use of Phiri's analysis but analytically engage this literature as a source of my theological observation. An examination of this research findings are hereby used to explore the interplay that exists in the social, cultural and religious context of these Indian women within this evangelical setting. I therefore take into consideration the possible influence that the Indian social and cultural context in relation to the notion of "maleness" has contributed to cases of abuse, violence and oppression of women. I have not gone into details of describing the social locatedness of Phoenix in Durban,<sup>22</sup> but Nadar observes that the large number of people living in Phoenix belong to the Christian faith. Secondly, out of the 160 families represented in a congregation of 650 individuals, the research was conducted with 25 Christian families. The in-depth research was conducted by interviewing 25 Christian women all living with their husbands except one who had divorced after 39 years of an abusive relationship with her evangelist husband (Phiri 2001:89-90). Phiri points out that the research was restricted to families where both husband and wife are professed Christians but it was limited to domestic violence where the victim is a woman and the perpetrator is a man. The purpose of the research was to document experiences of violence and abuse of Christian women in Christian marriages. Some interviews were difficult because the abuse was still going on. Weeping accompanied the process of telling the story as Phiri notes (:89).

### **3.3.2 The historical setting of the Full Gospel Church in South Africa**

The religious demography<sup>23</sup> lists the FGC (of God) as an evangelical church with a Pentecostal theological tradition. Anderson in his article "*The struggle for unity in Pentecostal Mission Churches*" (1993:67), classifies the FGC as one of the Pentecostal mission Churches in South Africa. Arguing along with Anderson's assertions who highlights that the FGC is the largest Christian church in the South African Indian community and approximately 80% of its total membership is black in other parts of the country (:67), Nadar stresses that most of the Indian churches in South Africa are Pentecostal, usually belonging to the FGC (2003:208,209). Pillay argues that Pentecostalism among the Indian community in South Africa began with the relocated families who formed new communities in and around Durban and Pietermaritzburg, and here Pentecostalism first took root (1997:291). The establishment of the FGC is traced back to 1922 through the evangelistic work of John Alexander Rowlands, an evangelist and a business man from Bristol with his Indian friend Ebenezer Theophilus who shared his devotion and holiness theology (Pillay 1997:291). Rowlands by then had joined the

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<sup>22</sup> More information on this can be found in Nadar's work (2003).

<sup>23</sup> Based on the latest census on religious affiliations conducted in the year 2001 by URDR, the Full Gospel Church is termed as the Full Gospel Church of God in Southern Africa. As a denomination, it had by then a total of 310, 041 affiliates divided into 174,579 Blacks, 41, 692 Coloured and 32, 242 Indian or Asian (Hendriks and Erasmus 2005:96-99).

FGC which he found "non-established." Having founded the UPMN in 1925, Rowlands with his Indian friends formed a zealous band of evangelists and through Rowland's two young sons, congregations were established in Durban (:291). Thereupon, Rowlands and his congregation (by then Bethesda) joined the FGC, and Rowlands was ordained there in 1931. The Bethesda which had founded Indian congregations with approximately 39,000 Indian members by 1995 was effectively passed to the FGC (to which the FGC was affiliated) after the death of Rowlands in 1980. This was destined to become the largest church among the Indian South Africans (:291).

In relation to my subject of study, an observation that strikes me about Pentecostalism as an evangelical scholar is the emphasis on "tongue spirituality" that seems not to change the characters of its believers. It goes without a second thought following the history of Pentecostalism that emphasis on the Holy Spirit is a predominant spirituality in any church that affiliates with the Pentecostal tradition. Nadar emphatically points this out regarding the FGC (this happens to be in Phoenix as well), where she grew up citing cases of emotionalism as an indication that one is more spiritual and as a sign of "filled with the Holy Spirit" (2003:212). My concern about this in relation to issues of abuse and oppression of women among evangelical "tongue speaking Christians" is the unrealistic manner in which this "Spirit" is unable to transform the male attitudes, dominance and oppressive theology of male against female. This spirituality is not evident through how men and women relate to each other in the church and at home as husband and wife. How possible is it that professing Christians (as our case study indicates) who in fact hold to the baptism of the Holy Spirit evident in speaking in tongues within the Pentecostal tradition are still held captive of violence, abuse and oppression of their female partners. On this I argue along with Nadar (2003:211) whose experience has been that the *one-dimensional* understanding of the role of the Spirit restricts the church from engaging with pressing social concerns such as emancipation of women. This is so true in situations of abuse and oppression of women.

### **3.3.3 The cultural and religious position of Indian Christian women**

Considering the origin of the FGC, it is vital to note the influence of the Indian social, religious and cultural context in relation to this particular FGC in Phoenix based on the nature of its congregation that is predominantly Indian. Phiri cites responses such as: "The Indian community does not share their problems. They keep to themselves. You only hear about it when the woman commits suicide" (2001:93). Such sentiments are not only attributing a woman's silent position in her marriage or devotion to her husband as a church member or may be a church leader but also projects the social, cultural situation in which she lives. Nadar informs us that besides being previously constrained

by the church, it is true that the Indian culture has also played a role in the way in which women view themselves and the way in which men view women—both in the home and the church (2003:213). She argues that:

“Culture is an undeniably strong influence in most Indian lives. Hence, we cannot speak about faith and spirituality without engaging some discourse concerning culture.....Such cultural ideas find roots in ancient Hindu Scriptures, and also in folklore and mythology. Even though Indians abandon Hinduism once they become Christian, the fact is that the cultural ideas found in Hinduism still impact on men’s perceptions of women and women’s perceptions of themselves” (2003:214).

Beliefs that make up our concepts of faith have much to do with influence from culture. This could be true of theology. Theological understandings have an impact on culture and are likewise affected by culture. It is therefore imperative to determine whether the predominant discourses portrayed as some expressions of evangelical theology that foster violence and abuse against women in this FGC have been influenced by the social, religious and cultural orientations of the Indian people.

South African Indians have their roots in India.<sup>24</sup> Although they have been exposed to an African context widely influenced by Western thinking, their culture has been passed from generation to generation. Nadar insists that many of the practices that Indian women have adopted in South Africa, both within the church and in secular life, are largely due to the unconscious appropriation of various discriminatory cultural ideas that prevail in India even today (2003:214). Robinson suggests that if one has to take into consideration the role and status of Indian women we will find that the Indian society has all along been a male dominant society (in Naidoo 2001:18). Kumari argues that the traditional Indian society looks upon women as perpetually dependant on males. Women had to be under the protection of men and consequently guided by them. They were often seen as inferior, objects of use and exploitation (1999:3). Naidoo stresses that she doubts whether there has ever been a period when Indian women enjoyed equal status with men. She argues that Indian women have suffered great hardship, and no other women could surpass the inequality of the treatment of Indian women, observing further that as part of Indian culture the husband is to be treated as a God and this applies to Indian Christians too (2001:19-20). Swart-Russell argues that the birth of a female is considered to be a family misfortune. If a male was born his birth was hailed as a joy (1988:311). If her husband died (Kumari 1999:3), his wife also had to give up her life. She was cremated with him.

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<sup>24</sup> Due to the limitation of this research, a detailed historical reason of migration, settlement and movements of the Indian people in South Africa will not be dealt with.

Although the culture of Hinduism from which most Indian Pentecostals have emerged (Nadar 2003:215) has influenced attitudes, ideologies and theologies that men observe in their relation to women, it is important to note that to some extent in the context of South African Indian women the transformation that has taken place as a result of hybridity. Nadar argues that South African Indian women have certainly become more liberated than their Indian counterparts in India (2003:214), even so, their collective psyches have not been completely emancipated from an inferiority complex or the need to be subordinate to men (Desai and Goodall in Nadar 2003:214). It is crucial to take into account the influence that culture has on theological presuppositions that govern Christian dealings in the church and other institutions. For instance, Chetty argues that Rowlands as one among the pioneers of the FGC emphasised cultural continuity with the Indian tradition and often “emptied” Hindu concepts and practices of their religious context and “baptised” them with Christian meanings (Quoted in Nadar 2003:211). This is a good example that indicates that any theological teaching that does not add up to enhancing life and human dignity must not be blindly accepted. The problem comes when unjust practices in culture find continuity in Biblical texts thus justifying for instance the oppression of women. This is evident among evangelicals who have used Scriptures that connect with the subordination of women under men in the way in which culture demands it. This can also be cited of some western philosophical beliefs on what has been normalised as sacred hence should govern how theological interpretations on various issues must be achieved. Such are to be taken into account while dealing with abuse, violence and oppression of women.

### **3.3.4 Theological observations on domestic violence in Christian homes: A Durban case study on Full Gospel Church, Phoenix**

Phiri cites the words of Madiba stating: “Religion has had a particular detrimental effect on women worldwide.....In the name of religion, women have been downgraded, rendered subservient and relegated to the background of progress and development” (2001:87). This is especially so looking at the nature of oppression and abuse that women have been subjected to even among the so called “household of faith”—the church.

#### **3.3.4.1 Domestic violence: Definitions and terminologies**

Numerous definitions of domestic violence have been offered which range from criminological, psychological and feminist perspectives (Swart 2005:34). It is noted that many writers have used different expressions to describe violence between among

partners. Researchers have used expressions ranging from gender-neutral terminologies such as *domestic violence (DV)*, *domestic assault*, and *intimate partner violence (IPV)* or *intimate partner assault*. Even so, they all settle for this one expression—VAW which captures the essence of the problem since injuries due to violence occur disproportionately against women and that men commit more serious violent acts even though both genders engage in violence (Van der Hoven 2001:126).

The Christian women interviewed in the FGC in Phoenix, Durban were given the definition obtained from the PACSA fact sheet that describes *domestic violence* as an attempt to control or destroy someone else consciously or unconsciously. Based on PACSA's definition, Phiri asserts that domestic violence can take different forms such as physical, sexual, emotional, verbal and psychological, economic, and spiritual violence (2001:91). Buckenham (1999:49) stresses that domestic violence is sometimes known as *family violence* or *wife assault* but she suggests that what has been generally agreed upon is that it happens within the confines of the home and that battering is a common word used to describe this violence. However, this dissertation intends to look at other definitions of domestic violence as elaborated by De Sausa (1993:17) and the definition by the UN (Soul City 1999:5)<sup>25</sup> based on the nature of this study. If there is one thing that needs not to be over looked in all these definitions is the attempt or the use of violence to exert *power* and *control* over the partner. These two elements in the study not only give us reasons why men abuse and violate women, but are an indication of what *maleness* is all about in relation to men oppressing women. Christian anthropological notions therefore take a central concern in our examination of DV as a theological inquiry. This enables us to theologially engage discourses that seem to correlate to abuse and oppression of women from an informed position unlike just any other sociological study on DV. For the purpose of this study DV implies that form of violence that occurs within a family. This is violence generally called "spousal violence" or more recently "partner violence." DV is therefore herein used operationally as violence between husbands and wives as partners living together within a Christian context.

#### **3.3.4.2 Forms and the nature of domestic violence**

From the PACSA's definition of domestic violence, Phiri (2001:91-92) notes that the women interviewed at FGC in Phoenix, Durban were given the following forms of abuse to facilitate an understanding of what DV in their Christian context could comprise.

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<sup>25</sup> De Sausa defines domestic violence as a situation where one party attempts to exert power and control over another party through the use of violence. The UN Declaration on the elimination of VAW defines DV as: "Any act of gender-based violence that result in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women—including threats of such acts, oppression, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether in public or in private life."

- 1 *Physical Violence* which includes slapping, kicking, shoving, choking, stabbing, shooting, perhaps using weapons such as knives, guns, forks, sjamboks and many others. Physical abuse could lead into a woman's death, permanent disability or her hospitalization.
- 2 *Sexual abuse* that is defined as any forced sexual activity, including rape. This may also include degrading jokes about women, name-calling, unwanted touching and using pornography.
- 3 *Emotional, Verbal and Psychological Violence* where the woman is made to feel useless and that nothing she does is good enough. The abuser may treat the woman as though she is only there to serve his needs. Psychologically the man may instill constant fear of threats of violence against the woman, her children or friends and relatives with intent to control the behavior of the woman. Emotionally, abuse may take forms of never-ending experiences of criticism, name calling, and put-downs in private or in public, while with friends or relatives. This may include unjust blaming, false accusations about loyalties and controls of time. The man might likewise verbally attack her personality, attitudes and beliefs or belittle any efforts she makes to improve herself, deprive her of sleep, food and so on.
- 4 In *Economic Violence*, Phiri notes that the abuser uses money to undermine the woman. He may spend most of her money on himself and only give her a small amount for the support of the family. He expects her to do more with the money than she possibly can. He may accuse her of stealing his money or of using the family's money for her own benefits only.
- 5 *Spiritual Violence* occurs when a woman's faith is used to keep her from finding help, or leaving an abusive situation, by telling her that she must endure, submit, return and make sure she doesn't do anything to upset her husband, and many more. In such instances, it is argued that the woman is led to believe that the abuse is her fault, and that if she seeks to leave, she is unchristian, and will be condemned by God. The Bible is quoted to her literally and out of context, particularly passages that serve to "put her in her place," condemns divorce, or glorifies suffering.

Among evangelicals, it is evident that *spiritual abuse* remains central and from this, all other forms of abuse are interwoven. Certain theologies emerge from an analytical examination of the definition of *spiritual abuse* and these predominant discourses remain similar to other forms of physical, economical, sexual, and emotional abuse that occur in non-Christian environments. These discourses as argued earlier are portrayed as some expressions of evangelical theology and could influence abuse, violence and oppression of women in the evangelical context.

### **3.3.4.3 Prevalence of abuse within The Full Gospel Church, Phoenix**

The case study on domestic violence in a FGC Phoenix in Durban indicates that there is DV in Christian homes. 16% of the interviewees experienced all five forms of DV as described in the definitions given. Phiri highlights that the frequent form of DV for this group of women was physical violence (84%) followed by spiritual violence (79%), economic, emotional, verbal and psychological violence at (67%) each (2001:97).<sup>26</sup> The other 16% who did not admit to having experienced violence in their homes may have done so because they wanted to protect their husbands' image in the church on the account that some of them were leaders in the church. Other women stated, "It would destroy our ministry to talk about our problems with other people" (Phiri 2001:93).

### **3.3.4.4 Predominant discourses portrayed as some expressions of Evangelical theologies**

As suggested above, spiritual forms of abuse exhibit theologies that portray some expressions of evangelical theologies that also contribute to violence, abuse and oppression of women. Five religious beliefs have been identified from Phiri's arguments supporting Heggen's observation (2001:97-99). These, she asserts, could be reasons behind which a Christian husband may abuse (and oppress) his Christian wife without feeling condemned about it. For the purpose of this study, these have been referred to as "*expressions of evangelical theology*" that influence theological notions of *maleness* and have potential to influence DV, abuse, and oppression of women in intimate relationships. These include: -

- 1 The belief that God intends men to dominate and women to submit. This is examined as expression of evangelical theology in the discourses of marriage.
- 2 The interviewees mentioned that the preaching in the FGC taught that the husband is the head of the family and the priest of the home. This calls for a theological examination of expression of evangelical theology in the discourses of *maleness* and scripture interpretation.
- 3 The belief that women are morally inferior to men and that her judgment cannot be trusted. As Phiri asserts, this indicates that men think that all women share Eve's

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<sup>26</sup> Out of the 25 women who were interviewed, 96% knew of a woman who had been a survivor of domestic violence. 84% of the interviewees said they had experienced some form of domestic violence. 67% (14) of the women interviewed were survivors of physical violence of varying levels and durations. 59% of the interviewees were still living with physical violence from their partners. 16% (four) women said they had experienced sexual violence in different ways. 67% (14) of the women experienced emotional violence for instance, "He disconnected the phone because he did not want me to speak to my father and mother." 67% (14) of the women experienced economic violence that ranged from controlling finances, never giving the wife any money and failing to pay the bills. 76% (16) of the women experienced spiritual violence. For instance; "He accused me of being so spiritual. I cannot read the bible and pray in his presence" (Phiri 2001:92-94). Phiri asserts that the wives of the church leaders could have been suffering in silence and although they might have problems at home, the wives of such leaders decide to protect the couple's status in the church.

fallen nature and are easily tempted to sin, and cannot make intelligent decisions. Hence, expressions of evangelical theological discourse on the humanity of women require scrutiny.

- 4 Phiri points out that the majority of women in FGC spiritualized their pain and glorified their suffering. They looked at themselves as sharing in the suffering of Jesus Christ. The evangelical theological discourse on *maleness*, the cross and Christian suffering also requires a thorough examination and critique.
- 5 Phiri asserts that many Christian women stay in abusive relationships because, after every episode of abuse, the husband asks for forgiveness. Hence, the concept of forgiveness within the evangelical theological discourse requires examination.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has elaborated on the social context of DV and abuse of women in South Africa. Recent statistics have been identified to elaborate on the wide spread and the increase of gender-based violence in the South African context. The chapter has further taken a closer look at the pervasiveness of such evils within this particular evangelical context. This has been made possible by theologically observing the DCS on DV in Christian homes by looking at the research conducted through interviews among the Indian Christian women of the FGC in Phoenix. Even though situations may differ from one particular evangelical context to the other, this case study of a small community may through light on the larger picture among other evangelical contexts. The historical background of the FGC in South Africa has also been given, the cultural and religious position of the Indian Christian has been examined and the prevalence of domestic violence and abuse within this evangelical context has been determined. The forms and the nature of domestic violence have been elaborated and the predominant discourses that portray some expressions of evangelical theology have been drawn out. Chapter four therefore examines the notion of *maleness* from Scripture interpretation.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### EXAMINING SOME EXPRESSIONS OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY IN DISCOURSES OF "MALENESS" FROM SCRIPTURE INTERPRETATION

The Jewish male Morning Prayer:

"Thank God I was not born a woman" (Olsen, Quoted in Tanzer and Fedler 2000:19).

#### 4.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter I elaborated on the social reality of domestic violence and abuse in South Africa citing its occurrence and prevalence in a particular evangelical context based on the DCS of the FGC in Phoenix. The chapter identified physical, emotional, verbal and psychological, sexual, economical, and spiritual violence as major forms of abuse. The chapter argued that the attempt or the use of violence to exert *power* and *control* over women in situations of abuse establishes the central purpose for examining notions of *maleness* in order to theologically identify its influence on abuse, violence and oppression of women. Spiritual abuse has been cited as a predominant discourse that portrays an expression of evangelical theology. This chapter examines how interpretations of Scripture have influenced the construction of notions and theologies of *maleness* within an evangelical context through the use of the Bible in relation to discourses on the image of God. To establish the connection between Biblical interpretation of the image of God and *maleness* in relation to men and women in the FGC, the chapter has taken in to account the assertions made in the pastor's sermons and teachings in order to establish the hermeneutical position of this church that influence the theologies that impact male-female relations. The chapter therefore seeks to examine the possible influence that notions of *maleness* have on abuse/oppression of women within the evangelical tradition. This has been achieved through examining evangelical theology, evangelical literal interpretation of Scriptures and hermeneutics on *maleness* and the image of God and its contribution to the traditional attitudes towards women.

#### 4.1 Evangelicalism and Evangelical theology

Evangelicalism is broadly understood as that brand of Christianity, emerging from the Pietist stream of Reformed evangelical tradition (RET), whose emphasis is on salvation through the personal encounter with the risen Christ. This is intended to include both Pentecostal/Charismatic movements as well as those who do not identify themselves

with those movements but who believe in the need for personal salvation and Christian discipleship through adherence to scripture (Balcomb 2004:146).<sup>27</sup> It is within this context that some *expressions of evangelical theology* and its influence on violence, abuse, and oppression against women among partners has been examined within the Pentecostal context based on the DCS of the research conducted in the FGC in Phoenix as explained in the previous chapter.

König (1998:81) affirms that the "Theology of the Evangelical Movement" has both the specific concept of "*Evangel*" that is related to the Greek word *evangelion*, which is used for the gospel of Jesus Christ in general and also for each one of the four Gospels included in the New Testament. According to König, the **Evangelical Movement** has been a very broad and diversified movement and its theology, understood as Evangelical Theology, has never been monolithic. The movement drew and still draws support from most Protestant Churches, especially as it developed in England and North America, and from there moved into Africa. König argues that the Evangelical Movement had a much bigger variety including members of denominations from Holiness, Pentecostal and Charismatic backgrounds (:82). He therefore concludes in this sense that all Christians may be said to be evangelicals, and all Christian Theology is evangelical theology, simply because it is concerned with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Even so, this is questionable, as can be seen from Balcomb's characteristics of evangelicals. It is only under the four features that Balcomb narrates that I suggest a full meaning of evangelical theology or Christianity could be realized. Then, who are "*Evangelicals*"?

Balcomb (2001:4) cites Bebbingtons' definition of evangelicals as one that has found considerable acceptance as a working definition. He mentions the four characteristics in Bebbingtons' definition of Evangelicals, firstly as *Conversionism* or the "need for change of life." König terms this as "having an assurance of salvation,"—having a personal experience of Jesus Christ as being born again (1998:83). The second is *Activism* or an "emphasis on evangelistic and missionary efforts." Thirdly, *Biblicism* as characteristic is "a special importance attributed to the bible by evangelicals. König observes that Evangelicals are bible centered people who refer to themselves as "people of the book" emphasizing the authority and the inspiration of the bible (1998:83). Fourthly, the last characteristic given by Bebbingtons is *Crucicentrism* or the emphasis on the centrality of Christ's sacrifice on the cross" (Balcomb 2001:4). Within this definition, it is established that the FGC as a Pentecostal Church emerges from the stream of the Reformed evangelical tradition (RET). The FGC interpretation of Scripture and the predominant

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<sup>27</sup> This may also include, as he has observed, a number of people in the "mainline" or ecumenical churches, those traditionally associated with the SACC such as the Anglican church, the Lutheran, the Methodist, the Roman Catholic and so forth (Balcomb 2001:146).

expressions of evangelical theology has been examined within the context of the RET and theology. It is vital to establish a brief historical synopsis of the RET before I undertake the major task of this chapter that deals with Scripture interpretation in relation to the image of God and *maleness* that seek to influence notions on the humanity, abuse and oppression of women.

#### **4.1.1 Evangelicalism: A historical synopsis**

Hunter (1983:7) argues that the worldview of Evangelicalism is deeply rooted in the theological tradition of the Reformation, in northern European Puritanism, and later in American Puritanism and the First and Second Great Awakenings in North America. To analyse Evangelicalism, in the most social-scientific sense, one must begin with the typology of severe Protestantism. It is suggested that Martin Luther adopted the Greek term *euagelion*, (from *eu*-“good” and *angelion* “message”) meaning “the good news,” or more commonly, the “gospel,” dubbing his breakaway movement the *evangelische Kirche*, or “evangelical church”—name still generally applied to the Lutheran Church in German (Wheaton College 2008:2).<sup>28</sup> Hunter argues that there are four major religious and theological traditions which contemporary Evangelicalism emerged from: - (1) the Baptist tradition, (2) the Holiness-Pentecostal tradition, (3) the Anabaptist tradition, and (4) the Reformed-confessional traditions (1983:7). Citing Weber’s arguments, Hunter (:145) highlights some of the religious differences among the broader traditions in evangelicalism, asserting that the FGC associations are in the Holiness-Pentecostal tradition.<sup>29</sup> Noll in his *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity* (2000:299-300), looks at the rise and spread of Pentecostalism and asserts that once the well-reported revival in Wales (1903-04) was underway; the Pentecostal movement rapidly became a worldwide phenomenon. It can therefore be argued that this contributed to the spread of not only Pentecostalism but evangelicalism to the Two-Thirds World, including Africa and more so, to South Africa.

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<sup>28</sup> In the English-speaking world, however, the modern usage usually connotes the religious movements and denominations which sprung forth from a series of revivals that swept the North Atlantic Anglo-American world in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The key figures associated with these revivals (also considered as early leaders of evangelicalism) included the itinerant English evangelist George Whitefield (1715-1770); the founder of the Methodism, John Wesley (1703-1791); and American philosopher and theologian Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) (Wheaton College 2008:2).

<sup>29</sup> The beginnings of Pentecostalism, with its characteristic practice of speaking in tongues as evidence of baptism by the Holy Spirit, is often associated with a revival beginning in 1906 at the Apostolic Faith Gospel Mission on Azusa Street in Los Angeles, California (Noll 2000:299). It is therefore established that Pentecostalism grew out of the 19th Century Holiness Movement. Hunter (1983:8) points out that it is within the Holiness-Pentecostal tradition that the perfectionist doctrines, moral and spiritual distinguish the Holiness side of this tradition. The role of the Holy Spirit in the process of individual sanctification—the process of becoming spiritually purified and holy is more salient here than in any other tradition. Secondly, the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” with the attendant “gifts of the Spirit” (glossolalia and xenoglossy in particular) are emphasised on the Pentecostal side.

Imperative to the subject of study in this dissertation is to establish the interpretation and the hermeneutical method that the evangelical tradition apply to Scriptures in order to ascertain their theological position. The next section elaborates this with an intention of examining notions of *maleness* based on the image of God in relation to abuse.

#### **4.1.2 Evangelicals and the interpretation of Scriptures**

As established earlier, *Biblicism* (a special importance attributed to the Bible by evangelicals) is a major characteristic of evangelicalism. Contemporary evangelicalism represents a distinctive conservative theological tradition that attempts to remain bonded to the legacy of apostolic and Reformation orthodoxy (Hunter 1983:61). Our point of departure in examining the expressions of evangelical theology in discourses of “*maleness*” compels us to understand the place of the Scripture (the Bible) in the theology of the evangelicals. Perhaps the most important element of evangelical theology is its particular conception of the Bible. The Bible is believed as the literal vehicle for God’s revelation, both of God’s own nature and of God’s intentions in human history. Furthermore, in evangelical theology the Bible is perceived as an inspired testimony of a perfect and supreme deity. Hence, the Bible itself is viewed as perfect, inerrant (meaning that it is entirely without error of any kind), infallible with regard to all spiritual, ethical, and religious matters. The Bible among the evangelicals is believed to be in the spirit of the Reformation, the final authority in matters that pertain to spiritual and everyday reality (Hunter 1983:61). It is believed that the Bible therefore is to be trusted as the sole authoritative testimony to absolute truth.

Corresponding to this conception of the Biblical literature, the evangelicals have a particular exegetical method for interpreting the Scriptures. Hunter argues that a *literalistic* reading of the biblical literature provides the basis for the evangelical metaphysic. He asserts that *commonsense literalism*<sup>30</sup> employing “lower criticism” has

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<sup>30</sup> The systematic biblical interpretation in Christianity has its earliest attempts traced back from people like Clement of Alexandria, Origen and others who lived and worked in the city of Alexandria. They laid a foundation of uncritical allegorical tradition of interpreting Scripture which lasted in the western church till the onset of Enlightenment. It was replaced by the historical-critical method in the eighteenth century followed by the literal approaches in the twentieth century (Ukpong 2000:3-4). The literal interpretation as applied to any document is that view which adopts explicit and primary sense of words in the Bible. The meaning of the sentence is normally usual or ordinary focusing upon the referential aspect of the words or terms in the text. Lighter argues that the literal meaning is best obtained with the grammatical historical method. When the literal, normal, or plain method is employed in seeking to understand the Scripture, the customary meanings of the words are understood (Lighter 1995:24). The historical grammatical method is a hermeneutical technique that strives to uncover the meaning of the text by taking into account not just the grammatical words, but also the syntactical aspects, the cultural and the historical background, and the literal genre. Lighter argues that the literal method became the basic method of rabbinism. It was the accepted method used by the New Testament in the interpretation of the Old Testament, and it was so employed by the Lord and the Apostles. This literal method was the method of the church fathers until the time of Origen when the allegorical method which had been devised to harmonise Platonic philosophy and Scripture was adopted. Augustine’s influence brought this allegorisation method into the established church, and brought an end to all true exegesis. This system continued until the Reformation. After the reformation the literal method of interpretation was solidly established and in spite of the attempt of the church to bring all interpretation into conformity to an adopted

come to be regarded as the normative hermeneutic for evangelicals (1983:61). This means, the Bible is to be understood “in its plain and obvious sense.” Hunter adds that concerning ethical, moral and historical matters, the Bible is to be understood literally. For instance, according to this view of interpretation in the contemporary evangelical context, if the Apostle Paul instructed women to be silent in the church, its commonsense literalism interpretation is that “women must remain silent in the Church” (1 Corinthians 14:34). If the Bible instructs women to cover their heads in the church (1 Corinthians 11:6), its literal interpretation is “women must cover their heads.” However, distinguishing the meaning of *illumination* and *interpretation*, Lighter (1995:22) suggests that they are closely related. He argues that illumination is divine and it is the work of the Holy Spirit by which understanding is brought to enable the reception of the Scripture. On the other hand, he observes that interpretation is the human work that deals with expounding the Scripture for the purpose of obtaining meaning (:23). He therefore concludes that the science of interpretation is called *hermeneutics*. Arguably, it is in the process of interpretation that differing opinions takes place. The interpretation as we shall see later in this chapter either holds captive or liberates the interpreter and the audience (readers). In this case, the Bible could become a tool for manipulation at the hand of the interpreter. Since the art of interpretation has predominantly been a task of male theologians, the humanity of women has been endangered were femininity has been supposed as inferior and *maleness* attached to superiority as a result of the interpretation that imagines God as male. I therefore raise questions of how this is evident from our case study of the FGC as a predominant discourse among this particular group of evangelicals.

#### **4.2. Expressions of Evangelical theology and Scriptural interpretations**

I have observed through personal conversations with conservative evangelicals<sup>31</sup> that it is unconsciously presumed that being male automatically places man over woman since she is female. It takes one to read within the “insignificant lines” of conversations, teachings, sermons, or literature in the evangelical academy to ascertain the presumed “divine” male position over female among evangelicals. Interpretation has much to do with this because every theology is biblically supported. The whole question of the humanity of women therefore becomes crucial and of importance to me in this study. In other words, what does it mean to be a woman in a context where male is hypothetically

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creed, the literal interpretation continued and because the basis on which all true exegesis rests (1995:24). Hence, a literal, Biblical interpretation is associated with evangelical hermeneutics.

<sup>31</sup> I was born and raised up in a strong conservative Anglican tradition in Kenya. My teenage years engaged me in diverse teachings, conferences and church activities within the Anglican Communion. I spent six years of my mid twenties working as a non-ordained staff member within a strongly conservative evangelical setting of the Anglican tradition as a cashier taking administrative duties at the accounts office. Although I was theologically uninformed, there seemed to be a general subordination applied to women as inferior.

the image of God? If God is male, how does this affect women's relationship with men in the home and in the church?

#### **4.2.1 Theological observations: Case Study on the Full Gospel Church**

Embarking on our DCS on the research conducted in the FGC in Phoenix, the interpretation of Scripture is evident in the preaching of the pastor. Phiri's analysis of the interviewees' portrays identified theological concepts that were intended to govern male and female relationships. My theological observations of this literature demonstrate expressions of *maleness* from interpretation of Scripture as aided by the pastor's sermons and teachings. Phiri states:

"The message preached in Full Gospel Churches, as mentioned by the interviewees, is that the husband is the head of the family and the priest of the home" (2001:98). She further observes from the interviewees citing that, "He preaches about husbands loving their wives and says that men are the priests of the home...He says that the father is the head of the family" (:96).

Citing Heggen, Phiri concurs that the belief that God intends men to dominate and women to submit (2001:98) promotes abusive relationships. These are indications that lead to some sort of Scripture interpretation in relation to *maleness* and the image of God. Based on the Genesis 2 story of the creation, Phiri asserts that what is often omitted is the Genesis 1:27—where female and male are created in God's image. She argues that what is not preached in the church is the fact that man in this verse stands for human being and not man as male human being (:98). It is therefore argued that the interpretation of scripture as portrayed in this case study is giving supremacy to the male gender assumed to be the image of God and this has led to how men perceive themselves. Despite the preaching<sup>32</sup> of the pastor, the interviewed women stressed that their husbands took it as a big joke because they felt that they had the *power* to do whatever they want (:97). Notions of *maleness* begin to emerge once concepts of male as head, as priest and as father are emphasised and supported Biblically. These are concepts that stress *dominion* and *power*. *Maleness* and notions on the image of God are linked to the whole theology of the mandate of domination that is frequently attributed to the interpretation of the Genesis narrative mentioned above. As will be seen later in the chapter, theologians within the literal translation of Scripture have argued to suppose that the male is the image of God. With the literal interpretation that women are to submit, subordination is inevitable and it is through such that abuse and oppression are inescapable. Closely linked to discourses of interpretation is the assertion

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<sup>32</sup> The interviewed women argued that their pastor mainly preached on issues of violence, abuse and God's intended nature of relationship between male and female (husband and wife) during Mothers Day and Fathers Day. The pastor preached that men were not better than their wives because they are equal in the sight of God (2001:96). The pastor's preaching on husbands not to beat their wives (:97) was a message that disturbed some men in this church. This gave an impression that the men in this church were guilty of this abusive act.

that women are morally inferior to men and their judgments cannot be trusted (Phiri 2001:98). From my observation, what influences this ideology is the interpretation of the traditional concept of sin that is associated with women based on the narrative of the fall in Genesis 3. From the case study, Phiri points out that some women challenged this traditional concept of sin (:98). Hence, it can be argued that there is no way that a woman who is perceived as the "origin" of sin can bear the image of God. These are some pointers that direct us to discourses of *maleness* from Scripture interpretation and in one way or the other leads to examining the evangelical interpretation of Scriptures further to determine the affirmation of *maleness* and the image of God as male from the Bible.

#### **4.2.2 The Evangelical interpretation of Scriptures and the imaging of God**

The word *image* has been employed and used in the bible in numerous ways. Christian writers have explored the doctrine of the image examining the meaning of the "*image of God*" in man (sic).<sup>33</sup> However, this is not the focus of this study. My specific interest is to examine one meaning that chiefly concerns the context of this study. This regards how through theology God has been imaged (imagined and created) in exclusive *masculine* perceptions that result into concept of "*maleness*" and its possible influence on male domination that results in abuse, violence and oppression of women. Hence, notions on the gender<sup>34</sup> of God become a great theological concern and one that has dominated the history of God in all traditions since about 1500 BC. Theologians are therefore faced with a theological issue of Christian anthropology that centers on whether God is male and/or female on the one hand and whether that image is much or less portrayed in the male or

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<sup>33</sup> Ortlund (1991:96) suggests, in view of the whole scripture, that the image of God in man/woman is the soul's personal reflection of God's righteous character. This means therefore that every human person is in the image (representation, resemblance, reflection, a copy) of God and His likeness (ethically like God). Sherwin, on the basis of the post-biblical Jewish religious literature observes that two imperative approaches have been applied to these two biblical phrases. He observes that living in the image and likeness of God means emulating God's actions, rather than the attributes of God's unknowable essence. Behavioral analogies therefore identify *imago Dei* with *imitation Dei* and ask us "to walk in God's ways" (2000:2). He mentions that this asks us to act as God acts, which means just as God clothes the naked, attends to the sick, and performs acts of love, mercy, compassion, righteousness, holiness, and truth so we should do likewise. The other offers ontological analogies between God and human beings that presume a similitude between God and human beings. Sherwin therefore suggests that the task is to identify the attributes of God that human beings share with God. For instance, since God is essentially an intellectual being the attribute that human beings share with God is the intellect, the rational faculty (:3). In the history of the doctrine prior to the reformation, (in the line of Greek pre-Christian thought, traced from Heraclitus and the Stoics to Philo) the image of God in humankind encompassed man's reason as the godlike element in him (sic). According to Aquinas this was conceived of as man's power of reason. The whole terminology of the image tends to concentrate our attention on the intellectual aspect of man's (sic) being. Clement refers to the power of rationality which is identical with our human nature, and equates this with the image, as distinct from the higher likeness. Athanasius conceived the image as a moral likeness to God, a likeness which became visible again on earth because Christ showed it forth in His life. In St. Augustine, a very similar doctrine exists where the image is the rationality of the immortal soul (Dix 1953:110-113).

<sup>34</sup> Gender is a social construction that then becomes a determining factor in the organization of the society in which it has been constructed (Stone 2004:4)

the female depending on how the interpreter genders God on the other hand. It is therefore important to examine the interpretation of Scripture to determine its influence on the predominant discourses on the perceptions of the image of God and *maleness* portrayed as expressions of evangelical theology and the implications of this among partners. This can only be achieved by looking at arguments and theological discourses from theologians on their perceptions of the image of God.

#### **4.2.3 Discourses on “maleness”: When God is “male”**

God must never be an object of our theological study. Even as the “subject” of our theological enquiry it is essential to be reminded that the definition that fits God (De Gruchy 1994:6) is that God is the mystery behind creation who can be known only to the extent to which God discloses Godself. However, evangelical theology has inherited a Christian tradition that has subscribed to a gender ideology and social system that embrace exclusive male images of God. For many centuries, Christian theology has taught and taken it as unquestionable that God<sup>35</sup> is male/masculine in gender (if incase God has one). Rajarantnam argues that at the dawn of religion, God was a woman, not so the Hebrew God, though. The Hebrew God’s gender from the very beginning as documented in the Hebrew Bible (known as the Old Testament) was always male/masculine (1999:5). Tobler asserts that the conceptualization of God as masculine—but disembodied and transcendent—found at the core of Jewish and Christian traditions is rooted in a long history of dualism that is articulated in religious myth and doctrine and western philosophy and psychology (2000:6). It goes without a second thought to note that the masculinity of God has been reputable especially through the interpretation of the metaphors and analogies in the scriptures based on the language of the Bible. Clanton (1990:16) insists that down through the centuries biblical interpreters have taken the masculine language of God out of context of the whole biblical revelation. She adds that they over-emphasized the masculine God of the Bible that few lay people have any knowledge of a God beyond the male gender. Abbey citing Tappa affirms therefore that patriarchy has *created God* in man’s image (2001:142), while Clanton (1990:21) concludes that we have created God in the image of a

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<sup>35</sup> One may ask; “What is God?” It is truly difficult to define or even describe God. As Mirman (2004:41) notes, to do so is to in fact diminish God as has been argued by the mystical branches of the great religions. She asserts that God is a literary rather than a scientific concept and that to have an experience of God is to know something that cannot be perceived through the senses, comprehended through logic, or adequately through language. Most theologians have argued for the existence of God based on the biblical (Genesis 1:1) attempt not to prove the existence of God but by simply settling for the fact that the bible declares the existence of God. However, biblists have defined God through God’s nature (such as God is Spirit, God is light, God is love, God is a consuming fire and many more) and God’s attributes—essential and moral attributes (such as God is Eternal, Self-Existent, Immutable, Omnipotent, Omniscient, God is righteous, perfect love, perfect holiness and the like) (Conner 1980:42-54). A definition of God adopted for this thesis is one given by Mirman who defines God as “A being of supernatural powers.....believed in or worshiped by people.....conceived as the perfect, omnipotent, omniscient originator and ruler of the universe” (2004:43).

masculine human being and have thus broken the commandment against making graven images (Exod. 20:4).

To further probe the roots of the formation of the *male God image*, it is vital to examine certain arguments that have been used to qualify discourses on the “maleness” of God especially among evangelicals through interpretation of Scripture. The creation narratives constitute as good a place as any to begin investigating the androcentric history of a “patriarchal God.” The interpretation of Genesis 1:26-28 and Genesis 2:18, 21-23 calls for our attention.<sup>36</sup> The concept of the *image of God*—often appearing in Latin as *Imago Dei* is a theological doctrine that asserts human beings created to bear the image and likeness of God. However, this has not been so for women. It is this mockery that could reveal how theology has created a male image of God. Lamber and Kurpius (2004:70) indicate that attitudes toward women are a predictor of male images of God as well as images of God with masculine characteristics. This demonstrates that there is a dynamic interplay of the “gender of God” and attitudes towards the humanity of women. Tobler argues:

“The biblical cosmogonic myth of Adam and Eve for instance, tells of the first woman created from the body of the first man, as his helpmate, and thus seen as only indirectly created by God” (2000:6).

This informs an interpretation that if God created female from male then it is the male who represents the full image of God, and the female is therefore supposed to be “inferior” to male since she was created as a helpmate. But, the concept of humankind—male and female together created in God’s image actually indicates that the Hebrew God embodies both male and female and is genderless or bi-gendered as Rajaratnam (1999:5) observes.

At the same time, Christian writers have used the fall of humankind in Genesis 3 to emphasise interpretations that portray the fundamental wickedness of women. Ess argues that assertions have been made that the woman persuaded Adam to disobey God’s commandment not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. She is recognized as the one who introduced Adam to sexuality so women are seen as

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<sup>36</sup> The first creation narrative—Genesis 1:26-28: “Then God said: ‘Let us make man (*Adam*) in our image (*tselem*), according to our likeness (*demut*)’. ..... So God created Adam in God’s image, in the image of God, God created them, male and female God created them” (Quoted from *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible: The Oldest known Bible translated for the first time in English*; Ulrich, Eugene et al. 1999). The second creation narrative—Genesis 2:18, 21-23 states that; “The Lord God said; ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’ ..... So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, (God) took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. The Lord God made a woman from the rib (God) had taken out of the man, and (God) brought her to the man. The man said; ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she shall be taken out of man’” (Quoted from *The NIV Study Bible 1995*)—the words bracketed are my own emphasis.

"temptresses" (1995:94-96). The interpretation of the creation narratives therefore perceives Eve (and women in general) as the sources of sin and death in the world. Ess further observes that the woman is seen as disobedient to God's authority and cannot be in God's image. Thus, there is a "mythic nature of the woman as chaos agent" where she is punished by God for her disobedience (1995:95). Such hermeneutics of the creation and the fall of female and male narratives in Genesis 1-3 have powerfully shaped men's devalued behavior towards women in diverse cultures. Since Eve is taken as the representative of her sex, women are likewise perceived as agents of chaos legitimising male wisdom, dominance, control and even the use of power, evident through violence to "keep her in the rightful position."

Further interpretations presuppose that only men are created in the image of God and women, created later, are secondary and inferior. Consequently, this leads to the imaging (imagining) of a God who is male. Hence, looking at how women have been imaged in the creation narratives points to the roots of a masculine God whom by no means "could take femininity" as "his" image. Dix in his book *The Image and Likeness of God* (1953:12) contends that the writers and readers of the Old Testament at first conceived this image and likeness of God in a crude manner, conceiving God as a "male" on a large scale. It is therefore argued that theology, explicitly or implicitly has fostered the concept of God as masculine. In other words, our theological articulation has imagined God as male and as Rajaratnam (1999:5) points out, in short, that man creates his God in his father's image through the statement that God created man in God's divine image.

Literal interpretation of Scripture also conceives the metaphor "Father" to literally mean that God is male not female. Lamber and Kurpius (2004:56) suggest that when God is anthropomorphised as father, God is classified as male. They have noted that some would argue that God is only symbolically referred to as father to demonstrate proximal relationship rather than to imply the maleness of God. However, Abbey argues asserting that the metaphor "father" has lost its meaning as the one who creates—the source of being. Since God has been presented in masculine form God's functions has been reduced to male power roles where individuals now compare the moral behavior of their earthly fathers with those of father God hence God is perceived to be male. It is from such that I argue that these are distorted perceptions of the image of God and as a result how we imagine God has possible influence on how men will treat women. Clanton contends that our imaginations picture a male God when we hear God called only "he," "Father," and "King." The masculine language for God also imprints indelible masculine images of God in our mind (1990:17). This is certainly true when we look at the discourses on the incarnation of God in Christ as male. A literal interpretation would

therefore mean that if Christ was male then God must surely be male. Abbey critiques this and suggests that when we hang on the maleness of Christ, we miss the point. Though Jesus was man, a masculine being, Christ as the Messiah surpassed humanity in order to change society's attitude to the oppressed—the poor, the sick and women—through his attitude to them (2001:151-1520). Lastly, based on the language used for the Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the *maleness* of God is affirmed. In sites of such interpretations it is clear that such analogies, a picture intended to assist in understanding the inner being of the Godhead has distinctively turned unhelpful having side effects. The interpretation that God is male presupposes that only males bear the image of God. The *maleness* of God is therefore used to legitimise the male paradigm of domination, power and authority of men over women resulting in abusive and oppressive behaviors of men against women. Notions on maleness constructed through interpretations of a male God automatically will lead to structures that subordinate women.

#### **4.2.4 Traditional attitudes towards women**

Perceptions that imagine (create) God as male and masculine has resulted in abusive cultures of oppression and violence against women not only in the general society but also within some evangelical circles. Men presume that God has given them power and authority to be over women and as a result women have been subjected to abuse, violence and oppression, which is not God's original intention and purpose. It is argued that the "*maleness*" of God suppose men to be "gods" over the women. Lamber and Kurpius points out that when the image of God is normed on male identity the preeminence of male as godlike is affirmed. On the other hand, women do not find affirmation for their gender role identity as being godlike, but rather there is a sense of otherness or inferiority (2004:56). This is clearly ascertained of women within the Indian culture and among Indian Christians of the FGC as the DCS indicates. Building further on what I mentioned earlier, Naidoo argues that in the Indian community, a husband (male) is to be treated as a god and the wife must be devoted to the husband and submission to the husband is a way of life for the Indian woman (2001:20). This indicates that the position of a male and that of a female is different. Hence, men can do anything as it pleases them. Mary Dally's radical statement is therefore vindicated when she suggested that "If God is male, then male is God" (Quoted in Abbey 2001:145). It can further be argued that since God is presumed to be "male," then, as Ruether (1983:53) notes, a woman therefore relates to man as he relates to God. As a result, a symbolic hierarchy is established: God-male-female. Women no longer stand in direct relation to God; they are connected to God secondarily, through the male. The influence of culture that

subjects women to subordination based on notions of *maleness* among the Indian Christians in the FGC in Phoenix therefore portray an expression of evangelical theology from the DCS. In this case, it is argued that the imaging of God as a male may influence male abusive behavior over women.

The “power for men to do whatever they want” as Phiri asserts based on the interviewer’s observation of their husbands (2001:97) is an indication that men assume a “divine” position of authority and control bestowed to them as men in their relation to women and how they treat their wives in relationships should not matter even if abuse and oppression is used. This mindset need to be challenged. Some evangelical scholars, Ortlund (1991:109) for instance, interprets the fall and God’s decree at the fall in Genesis 3 to humankind as God penalising the woman with domination by her husband. This implies that the general traditional attitude towards women has been understood as to be female is to be inferior and to be male is superior. It is to this effect that Rakoczy argues that women have been told that they are created in the image of God, yet nearly two millennia of Christian praxis has made a mockery of this belief (2000:15). In like manner, the reason why abuse and violence against women in the FGC as observed in the DCS remains prevalent could be because of such perceptions and beliefs among men towards women. That is why, for instance, the interviewed women observed the contradiction between what was preached and the reactions of their husbands on the concepts of equality in the sight of God (:95). The traditional attitude towards women has thus affected women’s humanity to such an extent that Rakoczy argues that women’s “invisibility” in society is explained by the fact that males have defined women as human-not-quite-human. What is less than human can therefore be subjected to control, including violence when necessary (2000:14). Therefore, this draws me towards a critique of the literal interpretation of Scripture that is applied by evangelicals as a hermeneutical method to an interpretation that seeks to enhance life to women in the South African context and beyond. I contend that the literal method, although not always, has spelt disaster to the humanity of women denying them life among evangelicals. It is to this task that I engage a dialogue with scholars in search for meaning while undertaking the work of interpreting the Scriptures.

#### **4.3 A critical look on Evangelical interpretation of Scriptures**

Ess contends that if we are concerned with violence against women, we must carefully consider the story of Eve in Genesis 2-3 (1995:92). She further argues that this story—more precisely, a later, especially Christian interpretation of this story—establishes an image of woman which mythically justifies male violence against her. She therefore suggests that to address the problem of violence against women requires us to address

the mythic justification of such violence (:92). I argue that this is not enough. Change attitudes must lead to new interpretation methods.

With regard to tradition, evangelicals hold to the doctrine of *sola scriptura* preserving the authority of the Word of God. It is hereby stressed that among evangelicals the Bible<sup>37</sup> is in the form of the Word of God or proclamation and is God's word to human creatures, and not human words about God. Personally I hold to its genuineness and credibility believing that God has spoken uniquely through the biblical revelation even though I do not agree on how it has been used to subordinate women in my evangelical context. However, I agree to the fact that there are human factors that influenced the culture under which the Scripture was written and the Bible later canonised. Clanton states:

"When we understand the male-dominated culture in which the Bible was written, we can understand why the majority of the biblical language for God is masculine. The culture in which the Bible was written considered females as property of fathers and then husbands" (1990:16).

This does not mean that the Scripture is not God-breathed, inspired, or infallible. For if it was not, what is the point of doing theology or to what hope do we engage to learn about God? We must take into account that when God inspired the Biblical writers, God did not violate their freedom as persons. No matter how much we think God should have cut the biblical writers free from the prejudices and imitations of their culture, this is not what God chose to do. It is to such human errors that the great evangelical scholar C. S. Lewis wrote: "human qualities of the raw materials show through. Naivety, error, contradiction, even (as in the cursing Psalms) wickedness are not removed" (Quoted in Clanton 1990:10). It is in similar ways that we battle when we come to interpretation of the Scripture. Arguably, when one seeks to understand the Scripture it is a quest to *an interpretation* of that Scripture. So, the question is: for what *purpose* is the *interpretation* being done? The problem is that there are different interpretations of Scriptures and when faced with such a scenario of conflicting interpretations of scriptures, we cannot sit and expect the Bible to interpret itself supernaturally. In other words, in order for Scripture to serve as authoritative at all, it must be read, exegeted, and interpreted by somebody.

It must be stressed that no interpretation is innocent. We have lost our interpretative innocence, and there is no innocent interpretation, no innocent interpreter (West 2001:169). However, there must be one principle that should govern interpretation and

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<sup>37</sup> The Greek word "*Biblios*" simply means "Book" and from it derived our English word "Bible." Though the word Bible is not used in Scripture, the Greek word "*Biblios*" is used often. Conner defines the Bible as a Divine Library of authoritative written revelation of God consisting of the sixty-six separate yet related book, divided into divisions; the Old Testament having thirty-nine books and the New Testament containing twenty-seven books (1980:23).

this is the interpretation for the enhancement of life. God's revelation throughout the Scripture depicts the great agenda for life, liberation, redemption and salvation. It is to this task that every interpretation must be engaged. This therefore requires a closer look at evangelical *literalism* as a method of interpretation. A deeper search for "meaning" from the literal evangelical interpretation of Scripture in the twenty-first century church might fall short at some point. Not that the method is flawed, but the point is that every plain interpretation of texts direct from its original context might not exhibit the same meaning in our contemporary context. Citing the problem with the "literal sense" of interpretation, Okure (1995:55) is entrenched with a quest to safeguard the authenticity of the meaning of the text and guard against subjectivism. She argues that the "literal sense" of the text is found only in its canonical form, as it is recorded in the biblical context. Nevertheless, she points out that the problem of what the text meant then and what the text means now remains and is crucial for our present purpose (:55).<sup>38</sup> Citing Nolan, Draper argues that there must be continuity between the two aspects of exegesis. Historical and literary study of the text provides guidelines for understanding the nature of the good news today (2001:149). According to their observation, the "shape" of the message would remain the same, even though the "context" might be different. Does this therefore mean that we must not engage any more in the exegetical task of interpretation? No. The search for meaning should become crucial to our manner of interpretation.

It is towards this search for meaning that contextual exegesis proves relevant to many Biblical exegetes of our time. "Contextual interpretation" if I may term it, is where the readers of the Bible discover the meaning for life. Draper points out that exegesis is primarily about the meaning of the text for today rather than about what the text meant to the people for whom it was written (2001:149).<sup>39</sup> This meaning itself is determined by the context of the reader, Draper argues (understood here not as a solitary individual but as a reader in a community), for what would constitute good news for the community (:149).

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<sup>38</sup> Based on the diversity of social locatedness of the different Christian believers especially in the Third World, Okure insists that taking full recognition of the influence that the social location of the interpreter is vital in their search for meaning in the Bible. She observes that once the word has been spoken or written, it becomes subject to as many interpretations as the audience or readers that it encounters. It can then happen that the original meaning intended by the author becomes lost in the plethora of interpretations given to it by its audience (1995:55).

<sup>39</sup> Draper looks at the interpretive process that involves three steps of: **1) *distantiation*** that allows that text to be intended to others and alien to the reader (letting the text be other). **2) *Contextualization*** which involves the reader/hearer (interpreter) analyzing their situation and get to know who they are in the conversation, and **3) *appropriation*** that involves discerning the nature of the communication and its implication to the context of the reader, hearer and the interpreter. This is the stage of accepting the meaning of the implications of the text for the interpreter and the community. He states therefore that interpretation of the Bible and the theology we formulate are fundamentally determined by our social, economic and political context as readers (2001:152-153).

This search for meaning in interpretation therefore draws feminist theologians and African women theologians to seek for those interpretations that are in accordance with the one will of God, which is to promote wholeness and life in its fullness (John 10:10) especially on the injustices of oppression, abuse, subordination and marginalization that women encounter. As a result, African women theologians have ascertained a methodology that interprets the Scriptures from their perspective. With feminist hermeneutics, African women theologians have developed cultural hermeneutics and through the tools of a hermeneutics of suspicion as a methodology, the message of the Bible is appropriated and abusive cultures are critiqued. Since African women theologies is a liberation theology that intends the "*mending of creation*" cultural hermeneutics is applied for the appropriation of Africa's religio-culture constituting a resource for envisioning the will of God and the meaning of women's humanity (Oduyoye quoted in Phiri and Nadar 2006:11). The focus as Phiri and Nadar (:13) suggest, is to retain those aspects of African culture which are liberative, and reject those which are oppressive. They assert that the standard by which this is measured is the standard of abundant life for both men and women.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has introduced evangelicalism and evangelicals as a Christian theological tradition. The intention of the chapter has been to examine notions of *maleness* as expressions of evangelical theology from Scripture interpretation and its influence on violence, abuse and oppression of women. The chapter has established the historical background of evangelicalism elaborating on *literalism* as an exegetical method of scriptural interpretation applied among evangelicals. The chapter has explored in depth how some evangelical interpretation of Scripture has fostered the masculinisation of God citing how discourses on the "*maleness*" have influenced some traditional attitudes and beliefs towards women legitimizing male power, authority and control over women. Hence, the traditional attitudes towards women are a predictor of male images of God arguing that when the image of God is normed on male identity the preeminence of male as godlike is affirmed and this influences the possibility of violence among intimates in the evangelical context. Based on the evangelical interpretation of Scriptures and theological notions on *maleness* established in this chapter, I now proceed to the next chapter. Chapter five intends to examine how these notions of *maleness* have influenced abuse and violence against women in the context of marriage among evangelicals. Hence discourses of male headship and the submission of the wife as a partner in marriage are examined in depth.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### EXAMINING SOME EXPRESSIONS OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY IN DISCOURSES OF "MALENESS" AND MARRIAGE

*If submission continues to be the "theory," then abuse will inevitably continue to be the "practice" (Borrowdale 1991:104).*

#### 5.0 Introduction

Chapter four introduced the literal interpretation of Scripture as a hermeneutical method applied by evangelicals. This method of Scripture interpretation has been examined establishing its influence on how evangelical theology has perceived God as male. The chapter argued that the traditional attitudes towards women are a predictor of male images of God arguing that when the image of God is normed on male identity the preeminence of male as godlike is affirmed and this influences the possibility of violence, abuse and oppression of women among partners in the evangelical context. The chapter further argued and established that notions of *maleness* are cited from concepts of headship, priesthood, and the male as father called to dominate and have power. This is evident from scripture interpretations contributing to male paradigms of domination that eventually influence abuse and oppression of women in the evangelical context in South Africa. Based on such facts, this chapter further examines expressions of evangelical theology on discourses of *maleness* in relation to marriage among evangelicals and its influence on abuse and oppression of women. The chapter explores the theologies of male headship and wife submission within the concept of the household code as "God's divine/ordained order for marriage" as observed by most evangelicals. To achieve this, the chapter examines the social, religious and cultural discourses in our case study of the Full Gospel Church (FGC) that has facilitated my theological observations. I have also examined some theological and historical arguments from scholars within the evangelical context that foster a belief on the expected subservient position of women under men. The chapter establishes some predominant concerns citing the home as a base of power, authority and domination.

#### 5.1 Theological observations on the Full Gospel Church in Phoenix

In chapter four I mentioned that the evangelical interpretation of Scripture has imaged God as masculine. This is mainly influenced by the patriarchal ideology of the Biblical language. In relation to some traditional attitudes towards women, a forecast remains

that *maleness* is believed to be the norm since God is "male". Being a woman is supposed as secondary and subordinate, not in full image of God. This line of thinking has also influenced the nature of relationship between the husband and wife in marriage and in the home revealing potential possibilities for abuse, violence and oppression of women in the home.

Embarking on our case study on the occurrence of domestic violence in Christian homes where the husband and the wife are professing Christians, 84% of the interviewed women accepted that they had experienced domestic violence of some type or the other (Phiri 2001:93).<sup>40</sup> According to the findings of this research, the analysis of the interviewed women indicates that they had experienced physical, sexual, economical, spiritual, emotional, verbal and psychological violence at one time or the other (:94). The position of husbands in marital relationships has been openly stated through the pastor's theological position and teaching as mentioned in chapter four. The men are reckoned as the priests of the home and the father as the head of the family (:96). The exhortation for husbands not to beat their wives and to remain faithful to them indicates the awareness that husbands were assaulting their wives and were not maritally faithful to them. This is counteracted by the responses from the husbands who believed that they had power to do whatever they want (:97). The research findings indicate that Christian women were suffering abuse, violence and oppression at the hands of their Christian husbands, with physical and spiritual violence rating the highest, 84% and 76% respectively.<sup>41</sup>

Phiri points out that apart from suffering in silence, women in such situations at the FGC in Phoenix suffered also from the influences of both religion and the culture in which they lived (:93). She mentions the predominant worldviews of these Christian women. Their assertions indicate an echo of the Indian culture, "a community that does not share their problems with outsiders" (Phiri 2001:93). This attachment to the Indian culture seems to have influenced their response to abuse, violence and oppression. Culture has therefore informed and influenced the way these women conduct their Christian faith. Nadar's assertion at this point needs reference since she argues that Christian Scriptures (especially the Jewish law code and Paul's writings) find continuity with the Indian culture (2001:74). A close look at the Indian culture shows that males take a special

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<sup>40</sup> See footnote 26 for an elaborate indication of the nature of abuse experienced by women interviewed in Full Gospel Church in Phoenix, Durban.

<sup>41</sup> Over half (67%) of the interviewed Christian women (14 out of 25) who experienced some form of domestic violence were survivors of physical violence. Up to the time of the interviews, 57% of the interviewees were still living with physical violence from their partners. For some, it was a slap, especially in the first year of marriage. For others it went on for between five and ten years but stopped with outside intervention. Yet others said that it had started when the children were small and had continued through 22 to 29 years of marriage (Phiri 2001:93). Some women argued that they could not read the Bible or pray in the presence of their husbands, a fact that Phiri cites as a form of spiritual violence where women were accused of being more spiritual than their husbands (:94).

place within the Indian community. Naidoo argues that a woman within the Indian community must do whatever her husband asks her to do. During her life span, the Indian woman constantly assumes the role of disciplined daughter, submissive wife and daughter-in-law and a sacrificing mother (2001:20). The Indian culture might have therefore greatly influenced the nature of marital relationships even among this Christian community since the Indian women's duty is total submission to the husband.

Further, citing Robinson, Naidoo argues that a woman is seen as a man's possession, part of his property and her place has been primarily confined to the home. Her role limited to procreation, upbringing of children and catering for the needs of her husband (2001:18). Kumari further indicates that women were handled as personal property (1999:3). Swart-Russell affirms that the groundwork for the subsequent oppression of women within the Indian community is seen through the birth of a male child in the family. The birth of a female is considered to be a family misfortune. The female is seen as someone who would not contribute to the status of the family and was regarded as a liability. On the other hand, if a male was born his birth was hailed as a joy. Boys were considered as assets to the family as he would be the one to care for his family in their old age and who would also carry the family name for generations to come (Quoted in Naidoo 2001:19).<sup>42</sup> Rajaratnam (1999:11) asserts that in childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her Lord is dead, to her sons; yet a husband must be constantly worshipped as a god by a faithful wife. Some of these religious and cultural beliefs among the Indian people if allowed to infiltrate the relation of husband-wife in the Christian context could negatively impact the lives of these Christian Indian women. At the same time, culture is broad and in a similar way we have looked at the risks of Indian culture, the same has to be done with the western and the African culture. This therefore requires an examination of the impact that Western (philosophical) ideologies and the Jewish and Christian cultures have on women.

## **5.2 The theological and historical observations on the expected subservient position of women under men**

The present nature of abuse and oppression in the home can be traced back to a number of theological and historical causes that are expressed through social, religious and cultural customs. The most restrictive elements towards women, Rajaratnam argues, can

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<sup>42</sup> The polarisation and definition of men and women as superior and inferior has resulted in men being regarded as normative humanity, and in being far more highly valued in society than women. Thus, the baby boys have generally been preferred to girl babies, and a woman bearing a son has received a higher social status than a woman bearing a daughter (Naidoo 2001:19). It is further argued that there were many references to the desire for male children within the Indian culture. Bearing sons was equated with the fulfillment of womanhood. A prayer to the god of fire was to save the household from the plight of "sonlessness" (:19).

be found in Judaism in the Old Testament, then in Christianity (1999:12). Unfortunately, this is part of the evangelical “ambivalent Christian heritage” and I cannot argue much against Rajarantman’s assertion. However, it is apparent that the church and its theological orientation have inherited a tradition of negative attitude towards women from the Bible. According to some evangelical stand of the Scripture, the Bible is not the problem. It is therefore argued among these evangelicals that the problem has been with those entrusted with its interpretation and its application, an argument that feminist Biblical scholars do not agree with. It is therefore vital to recall Clanton’s argument as mentioned earlier on the need to understand the male-dominated culture in which the Bible was written (1990:16). To this she attributes (if I may stress) *why maleness and masculinity* is the norm—italics are mine. Women therefore receive the subtle message that being a male, since it is used for referring to God, is worthy of greater dignity than being a female. Let me briefly examine the position of women in male-female relation and how things are from the perspective of the Jewish context.

### **5.2.1 The nature of marriage<sup>43</sup> relationship: A Jewish perspective**

The tradition of the Hebrews contributes much to our theological perceptions about women. Women in the Jewish culture lived in a male-dominated society. Rakoczy observes that only men were full members of the covenant through circumcision (2004:32). As Naidoo argues, patriarchy was firmly entrenched and subservience followed (2001:35). A good Jew even refuses to be served by a woman and avoids talking to one during her shedding of blood in her periods and in childbirth. Clanton stresses that in the Jewish culture women were treated as minors (inferior) and they were considered to be part of the possession or property of men confined at home. She holds that one of the Ten Commandments includes a man’s wife among his possessions, along with his house, slaves, and animals (1990:16). Concurring with this thought, Naidoo argues that wives referred to their husbands as “master.” Even while she is outside, her veil is a symbol and reminder of her hidden condition. In her relation to her husband, there was no question of love, only obedience (Tavard 1978:19). The wife was regarded as a means of obtaining children. Citing Evans, Naidoo affirms that it was very important for every Israelite to have children, especially male children who could carry on his line (2001:34). It appears that the man being the leader in the home played a major role in terms of providing for his family and leading worship. Women’s role was passive and even though the home was the domain of the woman, she still came under the authority of her husband or her father (:35). When domestic harmony is impossible

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<sup>43</sup> Marriage is part of God’s plan and is based on God’s idea as mentioned in Genesis 2:18: “It is not fitting that Adam should be alone” (Fortune 1991:143).

because of physical abuse, the only way for peace may be dissolution of marriage (:144).<sup>44</sup> One striking observation is the similarity of the Jewish culture and the Indian culture that both intend to subordinate women. For some evangelicals, the uses of the Bible to justify the inferior position of women find continuity from the Old Testament Scriptures (which were mainly Jewish laws by then) to vindicate abusive ideologies within their cultural context. What about the influence from the western world that came with a mix of philosophy and Christianity? As has been established below, this has enormous impact on female-male relationship.

### **5.2.2 The nature of male, female relationship: A philosophical perspective**

Plato's criticisms and proposals influenced both the Roman and Hellenistic Judaism through Neo-Platonism, and were taken seriously by early Christian theologians (Coleman 2004:52). Coleman further observes that the Greek theology avoided the pitfall of Latin theology where humankind was commonly equated with Adam the male, and therefore womanhood viewed as optional extra to him (:53). Kries (2000:4) asserts that it goes without saying that the Western intellectual tradition, as well as the history of western philosophy must begin with an investigation of ancient Greek thought. From this view, Aristotle becomes one of the most important and influential figures in Western philosophy. Aristotelianism had profound influence on philosophical and theological thinking in the Jewish and Islamic traditions in the Middle Ages and it continues to influence Christian theology, the scholastic tradition of the Catholic Church. The early Greek Church fathers and thinkers therefore blended Aristotelian philosophy with Christianity and this blending resulted in a dualistic understanding of women. Tetlow points out that Aristotle based his views about women on his understanding of nature. He believed that by nature men were superior, complete, and endowed with reason, intelligence and virtues. Women were inferior, incomplete, and lacked reason and the virtues of men hence subordinate. Thus, men were designed to rule, women to be ruled. Aristotle believed that women needed to be governed by law and by men to have order in the state (Tetlow 2005:158). Tetlow observes that Aristotle believed that women were not full persons, and he did not protect them in his law. It is therefore observed that

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<sup>44</sup> Maimonides (A Jewish philosopher—1135-1204; who's *Mishneh Torah* became a standard work and a major source for all subsequent condition of Jewish law) teaches us about the relationship between husband and wife in a Jewish marriage. He asserts that the arena of sexual sharing for Jewish couples is one of mutual responsibility and choice while the husband is responsible for his wife's sexual fulfillment. However, no wife is expected to submit to sexual activity with a husband she fears or hates. If the wife refuses sexual relation with her husband she should be questioned as to the reason. . . . If she says, "I have come to dislike him, and I cannot willingly submit to his intercourse," he must be compelled to divorce her immediately for she is not like a captive woman who must submit to a man that is hateful to her (Quoted in Fortune 1991:144).

women became more vulnerable to the crimes of men.<sup>45</sup> Structures of male supremacy and a patriarchal system of domination are evident in the Jewish culture as well as in the western philosophical beliefs that influenced the Christian era in which the evangelical tradition emerged and became part of. Paul's theology as pointed out in the next section has influenced discourses of marriage in relation to the evangelical tradition.

### 5.2.3 The nature of marriage relationship: A Christian perspective

It was the Jewish tradition that had the greatest influence on the status of women in the early church. Coleman affirms that the first Christian missionary to the Gentile world, Paul for instance, was influenced by the Hellenistic culture. He remained respectful of Palestinian Judaism (2004:101). He notes that they understood the new faith not as an alternative to Judaism but as a mutation growing from its roots, planned by God and achieved by Jesus. However, it is apparent that Jesus' attitude, as recorded in the Gospels, does not follow traditional Jewish reserve. His teaching on marriage implies the equality of man and woman. However, the Christian perspective on female, male relationship in marriage has drawn its understanding from Paul's theology on "rules of the house." Hence, Christian teaching about the model of the marriage relationship has traditionally focused heavily on Paul's letters to the Ephesians, Colossians<sup>46</sup> and Corinthians. However, an observation of the so called "God's divine order for marriage" as some evangelicals would be happy to term it (if I may suggest), indicates a misplaced emphasis on or misinterpretation of these Pauline texts creating substantial problems for many married couples. Fortune argues that most commonly, directives on marriage based on Scripture are given to women, and not to men, stating that wives must "submit" to their husbands (1991:144). This is often interpreted to mean that the

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<sup>45</sup> It is noted that he used the masculine and the feminine form of the word "citizen" in parallel. However, when he wrote about citizen holding office or receiving honors from the state, he used only the masculine form. There was no indication that he thought women should hold any office. In addition, he proposed that only men be priests, hold religious offices, and be in charge of temples and festivals. Male priests were to perform religious rites on behalf of women. In certain temples, men would worship on behalf of their wives and children so that their delicate minds would not be exposed to "indecent" art. Such proposals would have disenfranchised women from the one public role still open to them in classical Athens. (Tetlow 2005:155). Aristotle believed that men and women could not exist without each other, because nature gave them the role of reproduction. Therefore, they came together and formed the household. Within the household, there were three relationships: master and slave, husband and wife, father and children. The man was the first in all three. Aristotle disapproved of freedom for women, which he believed adversely affected the state. He advocated for the regulation of women and believed it was necessary. He thought that unregulated women who became dominant in their households would betray their husbands to their enemies (156).

<sup>46</sup> Paul in **Colossians 3:18**, 19 gives instructions for wives and husbands as a rule for Christian households stating: "Wives, submit to your husbands, as fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them." In **Ephesians 5:22-29**, similar instructions are given. "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the savior. Now, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleaning her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body."

husband and father is the absolute head of the household and that the wife and children must obey him without question. Coleman argues that this gives a summary of the "Household codes" which date back at least to Aristotle, who suggested that the simplest form of human association, the family household, provided starting points for analysing how a political system worked (2004:112).

### **5.3 The implications of the historical and theological traditions on Evangelical theology**

Having looked at the historical and theological arguments on the position of women in the Jewish, and in the western philosophical worldviews, it is important to establish the implication of these as they find continuity in our contemporary evangelical spheres. I argue that the subordination of women to men is prevalent among evangelicals just as it is in the general social, political and economical spectrum of the South African society. The formation of the social, religious and cultural paradigms that subordinate women as inferior therefore portrays *expressions of evangelical theology* that make abuse, violence and oppression inevitable. The traditional view of male/female relationships that has contributed to the victimization of women is traced through theological prints deeply rooted among the Church fathers of the early centuries of Christianity. For instance, Tertullian wrote of women stating: "Do you know that you are each an Eve? You are the unsealer of the forbidden tree: You are the deserter of the divine law: You are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image in man." (Rajaratnam 1999:14).

Augustine's interpretation of Genesis 2-3 has been significant in shaping the Christian belief in both Catholic and the Protestant traditions in relation to the subordination of women. Ess asserts that Augustine's interpretation developed a fundamental element of what becomes the orthodox doctrine of the original sin.<sup>47</sup> Ess insists that this concept and interpretation has implanted in Christian orthodoxy an image of the ancient woman which serves as a myth justifying the inferiority and subordination of female to the man in the order of creation and sacralises both a patriarchal relationship between the sexes (1998:102). Augustine's influence continued in European medieval theology (Rakoczy 2004:34), and all his successors based on his theological thought concluded that certainly man is superior and is in the image of God and not woman.

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<sup>47</sup> It is observed that Augustine appropriates Paul's assertions in I Timothy 2:12-14 with Manichean dualism resulting in a reading of the Genesis story in ways that the doctrine tightly associates women as the primary agent of responsible for introducing sin and suffering into the world, with temptation and sexuality (Ess 1998:101). Rakoczy (2004:33) argues that the early Church's view of women was the mind-body dualism inherited from Greek thought. Spiritual reality is one, but dualism appeared with matter. Thus spirit is good while matter is evil and dangerous. The male is identified with the spirit which is higher and better, while the female is lower because she is linked with matter.

Such interpretation has reinforced *maleness* to be a norm in the church and society to this day. This has negatively affected women in diverse ways and the uncompromised emphasis on the “submission” of female and the “headship” of male are crucial to mention.

Using Augustine’s thoughts, Aquinas’ theology insisted on male—(*maleness*) as a production of perfect likeness in the masculine sex, while the production of a female comes from a defect in the active force (the result of an accident to the male sperm) or even from the external influence (conceived under a full moon with the south wind blowing) (Rajaratnam 1999:15; Rakoczy 2004:34).

The ancient and medieval understanding of women as morally deficient in some way, and therefore requiring a man's moral correction, was reinforced by Reformation theologians and used to justify the secondary status they afforded women. Although Luther and Calvin argued that, like man, woman also reflected the image of God (Nienhuis 2005:117), Luther had a theology like so many of his predecessors even though he wrote and taught much about marriage. Notions on *maleness* become evident in his commentary on Genesis. Here humankind is identified with Adam the male, (as a more excellent creature than the heaven and earth) seeing woman as optional extra to him for the sake of procreation (Tavard 1978:172). His stress was on woman made for serving man and the primary way that is shown is in bearing children. One of Luther’s exclamations on this was:

“A woman does not have complete mastery over herself. God created her body that she should be with a man and bear and raise children. The words of Genesis, Chapter 1 clearly state this, and the members of her body sufficiently show that God himself formed her for this purpose” (Roper 2000:3).

Tavard indicates that according to Luther, women bore the impact of the curse, man’s share of it being reduced to the burdens of leadership. The rule remains with the husband and according to Luther; the wife is compelled to obey him by God’s command (1978:172). He rules the home and the state, wages war, defends his possessions, tills the soil and builds. While the woman, Luther observed, was like a nail driven into the wall. She sits at home (Tavard 1978:172). Based on Luther’s “sound biological principles” men have broad shoulders and narrow hips, and accordingly they possess intelligence. Women have narrow shoulders and broad hips. Women ought to stay at home; the way they were created indicates this, for they have broad hips and a wide fundament to sit upon (Roper 2000:6). However, it is expected that with the coming of the spirit of Reformation, things should have been different for women. But as established, the Reformation further subjected women to oppression and subordination.

Karl Barth asserted that the covenant of creation dictates a certain order, a relation of priority and posteriority, of A and B. Just as God rules over creation in the covenant of creation, so man rules over woman. He must be A; he must be first. She must be B; she must be second. He must stay in his place. She must stay in hers. She must accept this order as the right nature of things through which she is saved (Miles 2002:54).

These are bitter theologies to swallow especially from a male scholar like me. How much more for women? Such interpretations and discourses in the Christian tradition are a great deal of “bad news” about women’s humanity as Rakoczy (2004:31) mentions. The practice of subjugating women continues to this day. It is only the brave who believe with their heart and not their mind that women are equal to men will turn the tide of “bad news” into good news for women as exemplified by God through Christ. There is a need therefore to engage the predominant discourses that subject women to abuse.

### **5.3.1 The predominant concerns**

Understanding the dynamics of male violence within the evangelical context is a complex undertaking. Many factors—psychological, social and cultural as Rakoczy has noted, may induce someone to commit physical, emotional, sexual, verbal and all other forms of abuse (2000:12). Other traditional liberal scholars take a position that attribute male violence against women to the changing human nature that considers the real problem to be individual sin and immaturity on the side of men, which can only be solved through the slow process of education (Poling 2003:17). However, within the evangelical context, a closer look at the notions of *maleness* that portray expressions of evangelical theology indicates that a misinterpretation of what Paul presented as the “household code” has reinforced a culture of abuse, DV and oppression of women within the institution of marriage among numerous couples.

In the credible research on domestic violence against women in the FGC in Phoenix; (the DCS), the mentioned belief that God intends men to *dominate* and women to *submit* has been cited as two out of the four religious beliefs which could have promoted a relationship in which a Christian husband abuses and oppresses a Christian woman without feeling bad about it. My argument in chapter four on the interpretation of Scripture cited Phiri taking note from the interviewees that the message strongly preached in the church was that the husband is the head of the family, and the priest of the home (2001:98). As such, taking this argument further in the discourse of maleness and marriage, I argue that the theologies of wife submission and male headship and “priesthood” become major concerns within the laid

"Household codes"<sup>48</sup> as interpretations from Pauline Epistles to the Colossian and the Ephesian church (see footnote 49). This, among the majority of conservative evangelicals function as a blue print if not a "golden rule" that must be adhered to as instruction for Christian marriages. Knight, an evangelical scholar asserts that Paul specifically commands wives to "be subjects" or "submit to" their husband as fitting to the Lord. Citing 1 Peter 3:1 and Titus 2:4f as additions to that of Colossians 3:18 and Ephesians 5:22, Knight further insists that this particular exhortation to the wife to submit to her husband summarises the household instructions for the wife as the universal teaching of the New Testament that deals with the relationship of the husband and the wife (1991:168). Citing Luther, one scholar writes; "Indeed, Luther thought of the head of the household as being a kind of priest or bishop in the home. Each member of the household had a particular calling which he or she had to fulfill to the best of his or her ability; and all relations within the home are conceived as ones of authority and obedience" (2000:6). At this point, one could suppose that the concept of "headship" and "submission" in relation to marriage is the central problem of male violence. However, what becomes evident in my examination of the correlation of *maleness* and the abuse of women is the answer required to the question: *why* certain men choose to use violence against their partners? I therefore take this inquiry further in the next section through a theological dialogue that intends to ascertain some reasons for such behaviors among evangelical men. Notions of power, authority and domination require analysis.

### **5.3.2 The mechanism of women abuse: The home as a base of power, authority and domination**

Male violence, abuse and oppression against women must lead evangelicals and their theologians to reconsider the questions of power, authority and male domination. Back to the case study, it is evident that only 16% of the women interviewed at the FGC in Phoenix, Durban agreed that they had not experienced violence in their homes (of which Phiri notes that they may have done so because they wanted to protect their husband's image in the church) (2001:97). This suggests that some evangelicals might have failed to address one of the most common experiences of evil among its members. I argue that *Maleness* has been associated with godly authority within the home and in the marriage. It could be argued further that male headship and priesthood among partners has been seen as part of God's natural order and that God's hierarchy moves from men to women

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<sup>48</sup> The idea of the household codes comes from the Greco-Roman context through the practice of the Greek social philosophers who wrote instructions for the proper household management. These "household codes" usually instructed the father in the household to "rule" over his household wisely. Instructions were not given to the wife, children and slaves. The husband/father/master was exhorted to bring his wife, children and slaves into submission as his duty in preserving the social order (Kruse 2006:1).

to children. In *re-visioning Eve* (1995:102-111), Ess observes that the interpretation that Eve was created after Adam (Genesis 2:22), that the woman's desire will be for the man and he will "rule" over her (Genesis 3:16), and because the man named the woman (Genesis 2:23), have been used to vindicate male authority, headship and dominance over the female who is assumed on such basis to be subordinate to the male. In other words, that man is perceived as the authentic "image" of God who has been imaged as a masculine figure stands in the position of God within the context of the Christian family and the home. For instance, Roper (2000:8) contends that for Luther, manliness (in this case *maleness*) was inseparable from the exercise of authority over the wife and children and Luther argued that God's ordinance hallowed these roles. Defending this position, Poling suggests that this traditional conservative position promotes male dominance and hopes to limit the need for violence by educating women and men to adopt certain family values (2003:16). The concern here is: has this worked to reduce violence and abuse or has oppression of women increased on the basis of this belief? In this case the male authority anticipates unquestionable obedience in matters relating to decision making for instance. Violence occurs, in this view, when men feel that the natural hierarchy of male over female and children is threatened. The only means they use in the process of the need to reestablish this authority is violence, abuse and oppression of women in particular. This happens over and over again among partners. Some evangelicals have remained silent under the religious cover of theology and tradition of God's divine order of male authority over the wife yet the abusive violent husband remains and goes unquestioned. Sometimes the men are even defended in cultural terms. A good example is where male authority is associated with a man's "right" to a woman where wife beating is presumed to be part of the husband's marital responsibility. This marital responsibility also establishes men's sense of the right to punish "their women" for perceived wrongdoing, and the importance for men to maintain or exercise their position of authority. This understanding of women as under absolute male authority indicates a theology of ownership which portrays expression of evangelical theology since a similar ideology exists in various social and cultural contexts. There is an assumption that whoever is responsible for a woman must train her, and she is not to revolt against it. Nienhuis (2005:118) argues that even among the Reformation theologians such as Luther, a man's duty was to see to it that the woman remained in absolute obedience to her husband. Explaining how this operated in his own home, Nienhuis cites Luther's comment stating, "Whenever Katie (his wife) gets saucy, she gets nothing but a box on the ear" (:118). However, based on the evangelical teaching on submission of the wife to the husband's authority, women continue to stay in abusive marriages and tolerate it. The reality is, as a result of this, women are exposed to dangers of death, rape, violence, HIV and oppression every single day of

their lives. Hence, the concept of authority is one that requires a thorough address among evangelical couples.

My next concern is abuse, violence and oppression of women evident in indications that associates *maleness* with power over women. I contend that the issue at hand could not be female submission to male headship and leadership but is on how man exercises his presumed "authority" using violent power as a "divine structure" that defines *maleness*. As a result, the system that is established among partners is that of domination and control in marriage and in the home. In relation to the household codes understood as "God's ordained order" for marriage (Miles 2002:57), evangelicals need to deal with theologies of hierarchy, based on the teachings of Christ who's attitude and interaction with women was emancipative rather than subordination, life edifying rather than abusive and oppressive. We therefore need a thorough reflection on our dynamics of hierarchal power between female and male in marital relationships. Violence is intricately related to issues of power, control and domination. Scholars, especially feminist and African women theologians have argued that power dynamics and male domination must be subjects of concern in relation to issues of abuse, DV and oppression of women. Phiri notes that African women theologians have identified these as the source of all forms of VAW and children and that the reality is that there is power imbalance between men and women in the African church and society (2002:24). Rakoczy contends that violence against persons has often been described as unjust coercive power exercised either covertly or overtly. Violence is therefore likely to persist in society because power is unequally distributed and abuse goes unchecked (2000:7).

It is vital to take this argument further by looking at what scholars have argued about patriarchy. Others argue that patriarchy remains the master-mind behind systems and structures of male domination that is established and reinforced through male power and authority. It can be argued therefore that a system that enforces *maleness* (masculine) behaviors is a patriarchal system. Patriarchal social structures and patterns of thought provide the basis upon which violence is directed against women. In relation to my case study on domestic violence on women at the FGC, Phiri notes that patriarchy is a social organization and a set of beliefs that grants and sustains male dominance over women and children (2001:98). Stressing that patriarchy is the power of fathers that validates the rule by men over women and a belief that allows males to regard female as his property, Rakoczy asserts that violence inflicted upon a woman is often justified as a right of the one who owns her (2000:14). For instance, our analysis of social and cultural assumptions which underlie the sexual violent actions of men against women (even in a marriage context) indicates that such attitudes are deeply rooted in patriarchal mindsets which devalue women. As with cases of rape, female theologians have identified this as

sexual abuse and violence where abusive men prove their “maleness” either to themselves or the woman. The man takes what he wants, through power and control by impressing his strength on someone less stronger (Rakoczy2000:8; Buckenham 1999:23). As a result, sex become a weapon of power and control even in marriage where the wife cannot say no to her husband’s sexual advances for whatever reason. This kind of mindset even though not overt, reduces a woman to a male “sex object.” Since the woman is presumed to be under a man’s ownership, the man could resort to violence with a belief that the wife is supposed to serve him sexually and in other ways, a situation that Buckenham similarly points out (1999:27). What does this communicate to women since God is “male” and the male figure stands as a representative of this *maleness*? In relation to sexuality in marriage, Phiri notes in the case study that some women from the evangelical background were taught never to say no to their husband’s sexual advances except by mutual consent and for a time while devoting themselves to prayer (2002:25). Even though this can be Biblically supported, I raise questions for situations where abuse takes place in circumstances when the wife says no to sex due to justifiable reasons apart from devoting themselves to prayer. In terms of sexuality in marriage, the passages from Ephesians and Colossians<sup>49</sup> among some evangelicals have been used to establish a relationship in which the husband has conjugal *rights* and the wife has conjugal *duties*. In such a case, if dynamics of power relations among couples is not properly defined, the wife who must fulfill her “sexual duties” under submission to the head and the “priest,” and she will always be liable to suffer abuse and violence. Sex is therefore seen as a tool of power and control that men use to establish their authority and domination over their partners.

Patriarchy is the oldest form of human domination that was/is misinterpreted and misunderstood as God’s prescription and intention for men over women based on Genesis 3:16.<sup>50</sup> In most cultures, *maleness* as assertion of masculinity has been associated with strength, taking charge (to dominate) and being in control. According to Buckenham, men are taught to be powerful, strong, aggressive, provider and protector and have authority to make decisions and more of such. This sets a stage for domination. Feminist theologians have developed complex theories of gender power relations that unmask the purpose of male violence: to maintain male dominance. Poling on looking at the “Matrix of domination” insists that:

“Domination is a system of attitudes, behavior and assumptions that objectifies human persons on the basis of [socially constructed categories such as race, gender, class, etc], and that has the power to deny autonomy, access to

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<sup>49</sup> See footnote 46.

<sup>50</sup> After the fall, God says to the woman; “I will greatly multiply your pain” in childbearing; in pain you will bring forth children, yet your desire will be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”

resources and self-determination to those persons, while maintaining the values of the dominant society as the norm by which all else will be measured" (2003:127).

Hence, patriarchy as a mechanism used by men in a society applies domination as a tool. Domination cannot be maintained unless abuse and oppression is constantly used. Fortune (1991:122) states; "Battering is not a mental illness that can be diagnosed, but a learned behavioral choice. Men choose to batter their partners. Battering is the extreme expression of the belief in male dominance over women." Hence, to understand why men batter it is important to look at what they get out of using violence. Men use physical force to maintain power and control over their relationships with their female partners. They have learned that violence works to achieve this end. For instance, Borrowdale (1991:95) argues that in most cases, sexual violence emerges out of anger, aggression and the desire to dominate, not out of sexual attraction. She asserts that in many cases, sexual activity is expected to involve male dominance and some coercion. Christian theology that advocates male "headship" and female subordination without a second thought of a relationship that enhances life in abundance for both women and men as equals stands a chance to reinforce harmful abusive male power and authority. It is hereby argued that *maleness* is an exclusive imagination that has been used to create a God who reinforces the social, religious and cultural message to the society that hierarchy and patriarchy are God's design and desire for the home, the church and the society. Arguably, this could indicate that God is not only being masculinized but patriarchalised in the image of human power structure and this influences abusive, violent and oppressive ways that men treat women. This calls for a theological inquiry. Do male images of God as all-powerful and all-controlling in any way reinforce men's desire for dominance, control and authority over women? This patriarchal culture against the popular evangelical credence has been a snare, one which it has failed to escape for centuries. Tappa's argument must not astonish us at all when she states: "Patriarchy did not start with Christianity." Based on Jurgen Moltmann's observation, she argues that, "patriarchy is very ancient and widespread system of male domination" (1986:101). The issue is that some evangelical traditions only prove incapable of successfully opposing this system. Tappa further argues, "Indeed, quite early Christianity was already taken over by men and made it to serve patriarchy" (1986:101) It is within such discourses of *maleness* that we are able to see the portrayed "patriarchal vestments of God" who is imagined in masculine terms, reducing God's functions to male power roles of which the males act as his representatives on earth. Expressions of evangelical theology portray a similar system whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways under male power, authority, control and domination who see themselves called by God as leaders and heads in marriage and in the home.

## Conclusion

In drawing some conclusion, the purpose of this chapter was to examine expressions of evangelical theology in discourses of *maleness* and marriage. The chapter has looked at how notions of maleness can influence abuse, violence and oppression of women among partners within the evangelical context. Based on the DCS on domestic violence on women in Christian homes in the FGC in Phoenix, male headship, priesthood and female submission have been identified as predominant concerns that emerge and portray an expression of evangelical theology in this particular context. This has been examined through a historical and theological observation that has illustrated an echoing of the subservient position of women under men. My concern at this point is whether this observation portrays the general situation among other evangelicals as well. An analysis of the nature of female-male relationships in marriage from the Jewish, philosophical and Christian traditions and perspectives elaborates these facts. The implications of these historical and theological thoughts as argued have an impact on evangelical tradition as applied through Paul's instructions on the household codes if miss interpreted. It has been observed that a misinterpretation of these scriptures could result in abusive structures of patriarchy within the Christian home where dynamics of power, authority and domination results in inequality that seeks to control—leading to abuse, violence and oppression of women. Hence, discourses on *maleness* reveal that the social, religious and cultural masculine behavior and theology of hierarchy is a huge contributor to gender based violence, abuse and oppression of women. There is a need to challenge and deconstruct such theologies among evangelicals. This therefore brings us to chapter six of this dissertation. The chapter intends to examine the correlation that exists between discourses of *maleness* and Christian suffering and forgiveness. The chapter raises questions why suffering has only been associated with womanhood and not *maleness*, and how forgiveness must be understood in the context of abuse and violence against women among evangelicals.

## CHAPTER SIX

### EXAMINING SOME EXPRESSIONS OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY IN DISCOURSES OF "MALENESS," FORGIVENESS AND CHRISTIAN SUFFERING

#### 6.0 Introduction

The previous chapter established how notions on maleness in marriage can influence abuse and violence against women. Discourses on male headship, priesthood and the required position of a wife to submit to her husband's authority were major questions that the chapter raised. Hence, the chapter argued further that these *expressions of evangelical theology* that portray the predominant social, religious and cultural discourses might influence abuse and oppression of women within the evangelical context. The chapter established that power, control and the need to dominate their female partners is a major reason why men apply violence to achieve control in intimate relationships. In chapter six I now examine how discourse of *maleness* as a notion might have possible influence on the need for forgiveness and Christian suffering that leads to abuse, oppression and violence against women within an evangelical context. With specific reference to the research conducted on domestic violence in the Full Gospel Church in Phoenix: A Durban Case Study; this chapter takes a theological examination of the social, religious and cultural discourses on notions of forgiveness and Christian suffering. The chapter examines how Christian suffering that portrays women as "suffering servants" may influence abuse and oppression of women among partners. The chapter also raises questions on issues of forgiveness in the context of abuse and violence against women. To achieve its purpose, the chapter examines how Scripture has been used to demand instant forgiveness from abused women by their partners. Secondly, the chapter examines how the notion of Christian suffering that portrays women as "suffering servants" further contributes to incidences of abuse and oppression of women among partners within an evangelical context.

#### 6.1 Theological observation on discourses on forgiveness in the context of violence and abuse

Based on Heggen's assertion, Phiri highlights that the fourth religious belief that promotes abuse against women is that "Christians must quickly forgive and be reconciled with those who sin against them" (2001:99). Some evangelicals will quote scriptures

such as Matthew 6:14-15<sup>51</sup> as an example where Christians are commanded to forgive those who sin against them because their own forgiveness by God depends on it as Phiri has noted (:99). Sometimes preaching from Matthew 18:15- 20 and Luke 17:3-4<sup>52</sup> has also encouraged perpetrators to believe that they can demand forgiveness. However, as have been observed by scholars in this area, many Christian women stay in abusive relationships because, after each episode of abuse and violence, the husband asks for forgiveness (Phiri 2001:99). Family members, friends and the pastor may pressure the victim to forgive the abuser. Or the obligation to forgive may arise internally within the victim (Buckenham 1999:100). In this context, Fortune argues that the guidance that the victims receive in such cases from the church always points to the direction of "forgive and forget" (1991:173). From the offender's perspective, Fortune suggests that forgiveness is often viewed as an immediate way to be relieved of guilt for wrongful actions (:174). In this case, the offender may approach the pastor seeking forgiveness or may ask the victim to forgive. This reflects some of the discourses that prevail as an expression of *evangelical theology* that has possible potential to influence and contribute to a cycle of violence, abuse and oppression of women among partners. A woman facing abuse may be convinced (or forced) to remain in an abusive relationship with a hope that the abusive man will change following what I hereby refer to as a false "forgiveness." This therefore calls our attention to critically examine what true forgiveness means in the context where a woman is facing abuse in a relationship. This still raises questions of under what circumstance must an abused woman remain or go back in an abusive and oppressive relationship?

Sawyer defines forgiveness as that which addresses a break or a crisis in a relationship, enabling the relationship to continue (2005:24). Fortune looks at forgiveness as a means of restoration to wholeness (1991:173). Hence, evangelical Christians need to be clear about how forgiveness works in human experience both from the point of view of the victim and the offender. Forgiveness must first be understood as a process and not an instant phenomenon. In the context of abuse and violence, forgiveness, from the point

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<sup>51</sup> For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (English Standard Version).

<sup>52</sup> **Matthew 18:15- 20;** "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (English Standard Version). **Luke 17:3-4;** "Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him" (English Standard Version).

of view of one who needs to be forgiven cannot be understood outside the framework of the relationship between repentance and forgiveness, a process that Sawyer (2005:25) has termed as *continued repentance, reparation* and *transformation*. Repentance in this case means that the perpetrator has to take full responsibility for their actions, not shifting blame on to others. Phiri notes that, "While it is necessary to forgive, at the same time there is need for accountability for one's action" (2001:99). Fortune argues that, "Forgiveness before justice is "cheap grace" and cannot contribute to authentic healing and restoration to wholeness for the victim or the offender" (1991:174). It must be noted that saying "sorry" never takes us back, in the sense of undoing the past. Buckenham argues that often forgiveness is interpreted to mean to forget the violence or pretend that it never happened. She stresses that neither is possible (1999:100). This means that the victim will never forget the violence. As various scholars have observed (Buckenham 1999:100), the abuse becomes part of the victim's history. Hence, the sign that repentance and forgiveness has happened can only be seen in the fruit of change, which can include accepting the kind of church discipline within its instituted framework that supports change of behavior and attitude.

From the point of view of one who has been sinned against, forgiveness forms part of the process of healing of the victim. According to Buckenham (1999:100), forgiveness in this case is a matter of the victim being able to say that she will no longer allow the experience to dominate her life—and will let go of it and move on. Arguing on forgiveness Sawyer asserts that:

"The victim has to seek life in God and not death, moving on and not allowing abuse to define her or be contained by the hurt that has been done to them. Forgiveness is a form of letting go; a process of moving beyond the control of the perpetrator of the abuse. In a situation of domestic violence forgiveness is less what the victim offers to a perpetrator, and more about what a victim is enabled to do for themselves. It is a part of moving towards freedom, a part of the process of liberation and growth and a process of healing" (2005:24-25).

Hence, forcing a victim of domestic violence and abuse to forgive the perpetrator "now"—instantly, is to cut short the process of healing and may contribute further to the cycle of abuse. It may also prevent perpetrator's process of change, taking responsibility and being accountable for their abusive and violent behavior. These must therefore be considered thoroughly when making decisions as to whether an abused woman should remain or go back to an abusive relationship.

## 6.2 Theological observations on discourses of women as “suffering servants” in the context of violence and abuse

One of the religious beliefs which Phiri cites as contributing to a relationship in which a Christian husband abuses his Christian wife is what Heggen mentions as the belief that “suffering is a Christian virtue and women in particular have been designed to be ‘suffering servants’” (2001:99). The question raised by women is: why should a Christian woman suffer at the hand of her Christian husband when the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ said “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10) (:98). It is further noted that the women were able to reflect on what God thought about their situation of domestic violence. They asserted that God suffers with them, appreciates their endurance, gives them strength and is changing the situation.<sup>53</sup> They believed that God is with a suffering woman and will give her strength to go on. There is nothing too hard for God for those who seek God with all of their heart (2001:97). From the case study, Phiri observes that the majority of women spiritualized their pain and glorified their suffering. They looked on themselves as sharing in the suffering of Jesus Christ (:99). Among these women, abuse was also associated with patience and long suffering. They believed that God answers all prayers and God had a reason why their prayers were not answered quickly. However, some women questioned God and were not ready to accept suffering as part of God’s plan for them (:97).

Phiri further observes that women in situations of abuse not only suffer from the influence of religion but also from the influence of culture beliefs (2001:93). As mentioned in chapter four, Nadar writing from her context as one who spent her formative years in the FGC argues that culture is an undeniably strong influence in most Indian lives. Keeping in mind that most Indian Pentecostals have emerged from the culture of Hinduism (2002:74), Nadar observes for instance that within the Indian culture (from which most women in FGC Phoenix belong), suffering forms part of an Indian woman’s life. Franklin (1985:3) stresses that the typical Indian woman is told, whether overtly or covertly, that she is only a true Indian woman (*bharatya nari*) when she suffers in silence, putting her husband first, children second and herself last—as mentioned in chapter five.

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<sup>53</sup> For example; such phrases were common among the interviewed women: “My daughter you have gone through enough. Not long now. You are faithful. You put me first. Look upon me when in trouble. The partner I have given you will change. He needs to realize that by himself and come right. Then he will realize what a dedicated wife he had” (Phiri 2001:97).

### **6.3 Christian suffering as an influence on abuse and oppression of women within an evangelical context**

The kind of theological observation ascertained among the Indian Christian women in FGC in Phoenix, Durban, indicates a spirituality that is common among some evangelicals in situations of suffering. There is a theology in the evangelical tradition that associates poverty, suffering and lowliness as indications of being closer to God. It is the same concept of spirituality that we observe in this case of abuse and violence against women. The belief that God is near those who are suffering and that suffering is a Christian virtue could lead to a theology that vindicates abuse and oppression of women. The argument is: if women perceive abuse, violence and oppression as sharing in the suffering of Jesus Christ, then, abuse, violence and oppression in this case must be accepted to be that which God has allowed towards women. This leads to a thinking that compels abused women to remain in abusive relationships and do nothing about it. In this case, Christian suffering is interpreted in an oppressive manner contributing to a spirituality that has possible influences on abuse, oppression and violence against women.

Spiritualizing suffering is what might have led to women being seen as "suffering servants." Hence, the theology of the cross and Christian suffering has contributed to how women in abusive relationships interpret their oppression and as a result they continue to stay in violent relationships with an understanding that God has allowed such to take place. The question that I pose to evangelicals who perceiving women in abuse and oppression as sharing in the suffering of Jesus Christ is whether being a male qualifies their exemption from suffering? Women seen as "suffering servants" brings an ideology that connects womanhood to suffering. This, if not addressed theologically will result in legitimizing oppression of women. It is therefore important to examine how discourses on suffering developed in the Christian tradition and its subsequent influence on the evangelical theology of suffering in our contemporary beliefs.

#### **6.3.1 The concept of suffering in the Christian tradition**

The spiritualization of pain and the glorification of suffering is based on the ideology that suffering is part of sharing in the suffering of Christ who suffered silently even up to the point of death on the cross. This is not only supported scripturally among some evangelical Christians, but has its roots in western European theological thoughts. Augustine's designations of the problem of evil sets the background upon which theologies of atonement were earlier constructed. Nienhuis observes that a theology of

suffering began with early Christians trying to make sense of Christ's death on the cross. He contends that theologies of atonement still tend to commend suffering to contemporary believers on the basis of classical theological formulation that Jesus' death on the cross was necessary to effect God's plan of salvation (2005:113). On this argument, Nienhuis cites three classical theories of atonement in Christianity that feed discourses of Christian suffering. The first one is the Christus Victor tradition, in which Jesus' death represents a mortal confrontation with the powers of evil that oppress human life. Within this tradition, an appropriate response to suffering is patience, because God has a plan that will triumph in the end. Secondly, in the satisfaction tradition of Anselm, Jesus' death pays the price for sin, because only by his death could we be atoned for in the face of our sins. In this tradition, people are expected to see themselves as imitating Christ through their suffering. Thirdly, in the moral influence tradition of Abelard, sinful human nature is a barrier to redemption. Jesus' death persuades us to accept God's mercy towards us. In this theory of atonement, sufferers could potentially lead abusers from their abuse by being recognized as the innocent victims they are; that is, their innocence could persuade abusers to stop abuse (2005:113).

Among the reformers, the second and the third theories/traditions remained focal to their theology of suffering. Luther's theodicy (an explanation of the existence of God within suffering), is seen in his theology of the cross. In relation to the theology of suffering, Luther's theology of the cross is very significant because in that he emphasises that the crucified God identifies with our pain and suffering because God knows what it feels like (Dau 2002:98). This then discloses the contemporary interpretations and beliefs that people approach suffering with. God is present, as was at Calvary, among those in pain, oppression and those suffering. These three classical theories are glimpses that have influenced the understanding of evangelical tradition and are portrayed in one way or the other on how the abused women in our case study perceived their suffering. All the theological ideas about suffering are seen in a manner in which the abused women spiritualized suffering in their context of oppression and violence.

### **6.3.2 The two theological dimensions of suffering that influence abuse and violence against women in an evangelical context**

Spiritualizing Christian suffering in the context of women abuse and violence equates *Womanhood* with *servanthood*. As a result this associate woman with Christ's suffering on the cross. The theological implication in this case seems to indicate that the abused and violated woman must endure her "cross" as part of her suffering as a Christian. The

need for her to accept victimisation either comes from her personal convictions or as a result of being exposed to evangelical theology on suffering. Accepting victimisation in this context of abuse can often be related to enduring as a “strong believer” in Christ or as a sign of being a “true Christian disciple.” Religious discourse on Christian suffering is therefore seen as a possible influence and a contributing factor to abuse, violence and oppression. On the one hand, the Indian women in FGC could be assuming the act of “suffering servants” enduring suffering silently since that is what is demanded of them from their Indian socio-cultural context as a true *bharatya nari*. On the other hand, as good evangelical Christians they are obliged to remain in abusive relationships and endure their suffering for the sake of their families, as an act of obedience to Christ who suffered in order to take part in preserving Christian values that Christ set as examples. In this case, Fortune (1991:245) points out that 1 Peter 2:21-23 is often viewed as a guiding text among evangelicals.<sup>54</sup>

The first theological dimension of suffering that influence abuse and violence against women is when women reflect on their abuse and oppression to make meaning from their experiences of abuse by their husband. Buckenham observes that the explanation often has a superstitious quality. The woman blames herself as the cause of abuse and violence (1999:102). In similar case, Fortune argues that as an old-fashioned explanation of suffering that could cause a woman to remain in an abusive relationship; this seeks to explain the current experience of suffering in terms of a previous “sinful” act on the part of the victim which God is currently judging (1991:244). The connection between any past sins as a probable cause to her husband’s current abusive behavior leads to specific assumptions about God—who has been imaged as male. Suffering is therefore seen as justifiable and as Buckenham stresses, the conclusion being that God is a stern judge who demands that one pay for her sins and that God inflicts suffering on her as punishment for her past sins (1999:102). In this case a wrong theology on suffering influences a woman to accept and remain in an abusive or violent relationship.

The second theological dimension that of suffering that influences a situation of abuse and violence against women in an evangelical context is when an abused woman is seeking to know the purpose of her suffering. Fortune points out that the victim attempts to manufacture a good reason or seeks a “greater good” as a purpose for her suffering (1991:245). Often we hear within the evangelical circles assertions such as: “It is God’s will for you to suffer,” or “It is God’s plan for your life.” From such theological explanations, I concur with Fortune who argues that the victim of abuse could remain

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<sup>54</sup> “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. ‘He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.’ When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly” (English Standard Version).

passive in an abusive relationship believing that suffering is God's will and plan for her life and if so be it, who would forge against "God's will and plan?" (:244). Hence as Fortune suggests, the victim blames herself and accepts abuse with a belief, for instance that suffering, "builds character" or is "a test of one's faith" and therefore the purpose of suffering in an abusive situation is then the lesson it teaches and that the result should be stronger faith in God (1991:245).

These two dimensions of theological explanations of suffering are perceived having potential influence on abuse, violence and oppression of women within any particular evangelical context. Therefore, Christian suffering as an *expression of evangelical theology* has possible influence to contribute to abuse, domestic violence and oppression of women.

### **6.3.3 Revisioning Christian suffering as an expression of evangelical theology that influence abuse and violence against women**

Oduyoye argues that the language of suffering in African women's theology is part of the language of life (2001:108); hence sacrifice is associated with the cross and with suffering, counted as vicarious suffering that brings health, healing and life to the other (:105). Hence, we notice that the sacrifice motif has been used by women to turn themselves into salvific figures for their families and communities while at the same time the church continues to sacrifice women through its theology of suffering based on the ideology of the family. However, Oduyoye has stressed that the appropriation of women's habitual mode of making sacrifice is exploited by religious bodies both for their agenda and their teaching (2001:108). She further argues that women are compelled to sacrifice their charisma in order to maintain male power (:105). *Maleness* in this case becomes an altar upon which women's humanity is sacrificed in the name of "suffering servants." This has led Oduyoye to ask: "When will women be considered divine without the burden of self-sacrifice, if men can get by without it?" (:105). It is from this perspective that the concept of "suffering servant" finds deficiency in the *maleness* of men failing to equal that one of the "masculined God" and Christ as male who gave up glory to suffer for all humankind. The *maleness* in this case does not live up to its "representation" of a suffering God in Christ.

As Oduyoye demonstrates, the exploitation of women from the uses of this model is wrong. When women appropriate the theology of suffering and sacrifice associated with the cross, they are not asking for others to "make them" take up their crosses that they themselves refuse to bear (2001:107). She has emphasised the necessity of making a distinction between making a sacrifice and being sacrificed as a victim (:108). This

becomes vital especially in the context of abuse, violence and oppression of women in the context of marriage and family. The argument on this is that there is a difference between being forced by circumstances and conditions to adopt suffering and there could be a situation where women decide to choose self-deprivation. Buckenham exemplifies this theme by arguing that in a violent relationship, there is suffering in remaining passive, but there is also suffering in taking action to stop the violence. She therefore makes a distinction between *voluntary* and *involuntary* suffering (1999:104).<sup>55</sup>

While evangelical theologians such as Karl Barth, Ronald Goetz, John Cobb, James Cone and Reinhold Niebuhr have argued that God suffers with us when we suffer (Nienhuis 2005:113), there is a conflict of understanding between women suffering in abusive relationships and the assertions that "Everything will work out for their good" since it is part of "God's plan" (:113). In fact other evangelicals have encouraged women to remain in abusive relationships based on 1 Peter 3:1-2.<sup>56</sup> Must this apply in the context of abuse and domestic violence? The God of the biblical teaching does not single out anyone to suffer for the sake of suffering, because suffering is not pleasing to God. However, it must be stressed that any theology that encourages the view that suffering is part of God's plan is a dangerous theology. Nienhuis urges that: "If we encourage the belief that suffering should be accepted as a means of becoming Christ like, we are endorsing violence as a vehicle for Christian character development" (2005:112). His argument must be understood in the context of abuse, violence and oppression. This is because the problem with this understanding of suffering is that if suffering is from God and for one's own good, then to alleviate it is to go against God's will in some fundamental way. It could be argued further that on a large scale, such a theology ultimately leaves suffering in place—glorifying the sufferer with a reward of heaven, but it does nothing to keep the next victim from similar abuse. It would in fact do the opposite as Nienhuis (2005:114) argues. Phiri on a similar note affirms that it is important not to apply double standards on the redemption that Christ won for Christians. She observes this in the case of the abused women in the FGC in Phoenix Durban. She contends that:

"In the Pentecostal theology it is believed that Christ did all the suffering for Christians and that Christians must receive this gift and walk in victory over

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<sup>55</sup> Fortune observes that voluntary suffering is a painful experience which a person chooses in order to accomplish a greater good. It is optional and is part of a particular strategy toward a particular end (1991:245). Buckenham observes that this could as well be called redemptive suffering, of which the greater example of this type of suffering in the Christian traditions is that of Jesus himself (1999:104). However, unlike voluntary suffering involuntary suffering is not chosen by the victim; neither is it ever justified and never serves a greater good. It is inflicted by a person(s) upon another against their will but results into great suffering (1991:245).

<sup>56</sup> "Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words but by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives."

diseases, sicknesses, poverty or any other form of oppression. Then, if this be the case, why should Pentecostal women accept abuse from their husbands as sharing in the suffering of Christ?" (2001:99).

## Conclusion

This chapter has looked at how the social, religious and cultural discourses on Christian suffering and forgiveness portray expressions of evangelical theology having possible influence that might contribute to domestic violence, abuse and oppression of women in intimate relationships within the evangelical context. Theological observation on suffering and forgiveness are based on the findings of the DCS on domestic violence in the FGC in Phoenix. The chapter has examined the concept of suffering in Christian tradition, exploring some arguments on the Christian notion on the theology of suffering. Three classical theories of atonement that furnished an understanding of Christian discourses on suffering examining their influence on the contemporary evangelical tradition. A critical theological reflection has been engaged that has pulled in to dialogue on various views on suffering with an effort of revisioning Christian suffering in the context of abuse and oppression women. The chapter has argued and established that forgiveness is a process that involves a relationship between repentance and change. Furthermore, evangelicals need to be clear on what forgiveness means to both the perpetrator and the victim before advocating for the doctrine of forgiveness. This chapter marks the end of the examination of the predominant social, religious and cultural discourses that portray some *expressions of evangelical theology* that influence abuse, violence and oppression of women within an evangelical context. The next chapter looks at the possible alternative evangelical discourses and resources for transformation for the emancipation of women and men. The chapter will engage a theological reflection that seeks to establish the need for alternative theological discourses and resources for transformation in relation to abuse and oppression of women among evangelicals. The chapter argues that praxis must be informed by transformative theologies. Therefore, the chapter engages transformative theologies and thereafter cites simple practical aspects that evangelicals can apply to transform men. Although praxis must come first as a result of our faith commitment to see change taking place, there has to be a continuous circle of praxis-theory-praxis or a process of "doing theology"-theologising-"doing theology."<sup>57</sup> Hence, chapter seven engages various theological concepts and discourses as resources that should enable evangelicals to be engaged in transformative practices.

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<sup>57</sup> "Doing theology" in this case is used as the practical involvement of applying the transformative theologies engaged.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### ALTERNATIVE EVANGELICAL THEOLOGIES, DISCOURSES AND RESOURCES FOR TRANSFORMATION

*"Theological statements contain as much truth as they deliver practically in transforming reality" (Sölle quoted in Ackermann 1996:42).*

#### 7.0 Introduction

The previous four chapters (three, four, five and six) have examined the nature and forms of social, religious and cultural discourses on notions of *maleness*, and its possible influence on domestic violence, abuse and oppression of women within an evangelical context in South Africa. Based on the Durban case study (DCS) of the Full Gospel Church (FGC) in Phoenix, the dissertation has argued that the predominant discourses portray some expressions of evangelical theology and have subsequent possibilities of influencing abuse and oppression of women. My theological reflection has engaged theological discourses that have examined the social, religious and cultural notions on *maleness* as observed in the case study of the FGC. This has therefore informed my quest towards a search for alternative evangelical theological discourses and resources for transformation in this chapter. The chapter therefore fosters a theological reflection with an intention of exploring and engaging alternatives within the existing evangelical framework. This envisions alternatives that counteract abusive expressions of evangelical theologies that portray social, religious and cultural notions on *maleness* that might influence domestic violence, abuse and oppression of women within any evangelical context. The chapter engages a theological reflection seeking to establish the need for alternative theological discourses and resources for transformation. The chapter further argues that praxis must be informed by transformative theologies. Therefore, this chapter engages transformative theologies and thereafter cites simple practical aspects that evangelicals can apply to change men's attitudes about themselves and their traditional attitudes towards women.

#### 7.1 The need for alternative theological discourses and resources for transformation

Poling argues that uncritical appropriation of traditional theology creates problems in three areas: (1) images of women, (2) images of God, and (3) images of faith and practice (2003:71). This assertion concurs with the task of this work since my examination of some *expressions of evangelical theology* has identified similar areas as

factors that contribute to notions of *maleness* that have possible influence on violence, abuse and oppression of women. Based on Poling's dread of uncritical appropriation of traditional theology, it is essential to note that any theology has always to be continually reworked because a living theology must always be contextual. This is because context and our understanding are constantly changing. The context of any theology varies not only with time but also with locality. For instance, theology appropriated three hundred years ago in the Western context is not appropriate for now in Africa. As evangelicals, we hold allegiance to apostolic truths and traditions. However, theological teachings are only justified if they elucidate the realities of our time, illumine the situations and guide transformative actions. This is evident in Christ's ministry and teaching over and over again and must be a model to which our theologies should be shaped. Hence, theologies of the early church apostles and the early church father's were shaped differently by their contexts and even though they set precedence for our contemporary theological thinking and arguments, they must be reworked in order for them to speak into and transform our contexts.

The examination of how theological notions and church traditions influence discourses on *maleness* resulting in male violence, abuse and oppression of women among certain evangelicals in the South African context indicates that there is a need for alternative evangelical theological discourses. Various scholars have raised concerns and argued for the need of theological reflection that fosters alternative theologies that will counteract such evils in the South African context. Maluleke and Nadar in —*Breaking the Covenant of Violence Against Women*” (2002:16) conclude by proposing a deconstructive and counter strategies within culture and religion stating, “It is in practice of such deconstruction that alternative theologies to counter oppressive theologies pitted against women can be found.” Nadar contends that there is enough feminist research indicating that the belief that men are the heads of the homes is what causes violence to go unchallenged and women to remain in abusive relationships (2009:7). She therefore advocates for deconstruction and reconstruction of alternative models/forms of positive masculinity, suggesting partnership rather than submission (:14)—Unpublished Paper; Stellenbosch, June 2009. Cooper-White insists that scholars should construct new theological images that will deconstruct the authoritarian “God-idol” of old and reconstruct a God of love and justice, images that pose alternatives to the patriarchal God-father-judge (1995:41). Phiri's research on *Domestic Violence in Christian Homes: A Durban Case Study*” (2001:87), concluded with a concern arguing: “The challenge is to find a balance between an interpretation of religion that oppresses, and one that liberates.” Overall, a search for this “interpretation of religion that liberates” calls for alternative evangelical transformative theologies. Further, Phiri is concerned with a

theology that takes the experience of women within patriarchy seriously. She, for instance insists that sexual violence is as a result of patriarchy, which has made violence a power game (2002:19). However, her major theological dilemma remains as: "How then can one dismantle patriarchy to ensure that women and children are protected....?" (:19). This dilemma can only be addressed by engaging theologies of transformation within the evangelical setting. It is for this reason that this dissertation takes into consideration such scholarly challenges observed by the above mentioned theologians with an intention of reflecting on transformative theologies that should lead to praxis.

## **7.2 Alternative Evangelical theologies and discourse for transformation**

Facing the evil of male violence, abuse and oppression of women within the evangelical context requires a reinterpretation of much of the evangelical theologies. Theological observations from the DCS imply that the justification of violence is evident within the underlying references to theological presuppositions and teachings that contribute and legitimise many forms of abuse and oppression of women as observed through the predominant discourses. The church comes under the judgment of God and invites rejection from men and women when it fails to lead her people into the full meaning of life together, or withholds the compassion of Christ from those caught in the theological confusion of our time. It is to this task that evangelical theologies for transformation must be sought. Transformation is the alternative to endurance and passivity, and means arising to engage the injustices that prevail within systems and structures of dominance, abuse and oppression. It is a belief that things must not remain the way they are. Fortune argues that:

"Transformation is the means by which, refusing to accept injustice and refusing to assist its victims to endure suffering any longer, people act. It is a trust in righteous anger in the face of evil which pushes people to action" (1991:249).

It is to this caution of passivity that I foster various transformative theologies that must push evangelicals to action. This has been achieved through a theological reflection that has engaged dialogues with various scholars.

### **7.2.1 Theologies of life and a search for a community of life**

Domestic violence (family violence), abuse and oppression of women are not new phenomena, but are frightening realities to women's lives that deny them life in its fullness. Theological ideologies that govern some evangelical principles have led to belief systems and theological assertions and structures that are life denying for women in the homes and in society in general. These therefore call for theologies that speak life to

counter abusive perceptions that have objectified women to all sorts of violence and oppression. The image of *life* from an evangelical perspective applicable in situations of domestic violence, abuse and oppression of women calls for a theology that focuses on ***mutuality of desire*** that promotes a belief that God wants human beings to flourish and grow in loving relationships with one another and with God the source of life. The parameters for the mutuality of desire encompasses a knowing that God does not intend people to perpetrate or suffer from domestic violence and abuse and that God works with and through creation to end such evils and the harm it causes. This must be the understanding of a community of faith that is in search for life for its people.

The contention that God works with men and women to end abusive and oppressive theologies and traditions begs the evangelical community of faith to question whether their theologies are edifying or dehumanising to women. Observations made from the predominant discourses that portray expressions of evangelical theology indicate otherwise. In order to be a Christian community that is life enhancing, evangelicals and their theologians must be willing to reconstruct their basic ideas about the God of life inspired through Christ who proclaimed in the Gospel: "...I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10 NRSV). With de Gruchy, I concur, on the quest for a *telos*. In his quest for a theology that seeks to focus on and promote *life* in the midst of social injustices that include patriarchy, HIV AIDS, exclusion, abnormal cultural norms, gender-based violence, abuse, oppression and the like, De Gruchy (2009:135-136) proposes a concept of what our theologies should entail; a theology in service to *life* that stands on one of Christ's inspired theological approaches as recorded in John 10:10.<sup>58</sup> In like manner, *mutuality of desire* within a search for a community of life goes beyond the face-to-face interpersonal relationships. Since a community includes institutions of power and ideologies<sup>59</sup> that shape and control the very context of our lives, alternative theologies have a great part to contribute to the "reformation" of such a community especially for women who are created in the image and likeness of the God of love and justice.

An enormous task for evangelical theologians is to deconstruct and reconstruct the distorted images associated with female; distorted images and theological statements about God, and evangelical traditions that influence female-male relationships. These are in relation to women's experiences that lead to strategies of liberative actions that portray the redemptive work of Christ who died for all. Poling points out that the images

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<sup>58</sup> De Gruchy insists that theologians must begin to focus on the theme of *life* as the purpose of theology and the Christian life. He argues that liberation theologians are clear that this *telos* is the breaking of the bonds of oppression, and the promotion of liberation (2009:135).

<sup>59</sup> Ideology is the normative horizon of language and the implicit assumptions that govern perception and identity (Poling 2003:162).

of God, community, and human nature that are predominant in a culture establish the ideas and limits of human potential at its deepest level (2003:163). This portrays the need for the proposed framework that focuses on the concept of “*mending of creation*” as emphasized in chapter two. *Mutuality of desire* as an alternative theological discourse that seeks abundant life for transformative action must embark first on *theological interpretations* of the faith document (the Bible). Our interpretative framework should be that in search of wholeness, healing and what promotes life. Every interpretation that denies life compels scrutiny. This suggests that the type of theology that emerges from our interpretation is influenced by the assumptions and questions with which we approach the Bible; and must be in a position of promoting life in its fullness especially for the oppressed. Interpreting the Bible as our faith resource book in search for what promotes life will therefore involve an interpretation that fosters an *inclusive community* as an alternative to an exclusive male-centered community which is maintained by and for their advantage. Interpretation for inclusivity with a purpose of enhancing life must therefore be geared towards gender equality, resisting violence, abuse and oppression of women and the vulnerable, promotion of peace with justice, asking questions of systems and structures and many more.

Scholars within the evangelical faith community need to engage with women in their theologies of resistance against all that is life denying as a sign of mutuality of desire. This engagement as a redemptive practice (*liberation praxis*) calls attention to various hermeneutical methods necessary for interpretations that pursue inclusivity for life. Citing the work of Fiorenza, Kanyoro (1999:387) points out some of the alternative hermeneutical methods that could be applied towards interpretation of texts geared towards theologies of resistance in enhancing life for women. She points out the *hermeneutics of proclamation* that encourages the reader to reflect on the message by asking: what is the authoritative message of salvation (*redemption*—emphasis added) over the historical factualness? (What has been historically believed as facts). *Hermeneutics of remembrance* provides memory of women’s history asking us to reconstruct the text if need be. The *hermeneutics of commitment* (developed by Letty Russell) questions what that particular text is urging us to do. Bearing in mind the idea of commitment is for the text to send us “to do” something. Since liberation praxis in search for life is a *prophetic task*, our theologies of resistance envision change and transformation that involves risks that requires courage. Part of this prophetic task can only be fulfilled through the *hermeneutics of suspicion*. Melanchthon in this case, cites Fiorenza suggesting that the question that the hermeneutic is based upon is, “Whose agenda is being served in the given passage/tradition” (1999:287). Gabriele Dietrich calls this *exegetical suspicion* (Quoted in Melanchthon 1999:287). These hermeneutics

should be applied to the evangelical traditions, cultures and customs, to the preaching we hear every Sunday, and to any theology at our disposal. This suggests that theologies are shaped by interpretations. Interpretative strategies have effects on the way in which men and women shape their relationships and actions. We must therefore be suspicious of every theology (and interpretation) that promotes power that creates dominance leading to abuse, violence and evil and begin promoting theologies which are life-giving. This requires of us to also employ the *hermeneutics of wisdom* (Melancthon 1999:289) that calls us to be critical of all the voices and ideologies that oppress not only women but the weak too.

### **7.2.2 Trinitarian theologies of communion and relationship**

The doctrine of the Trinity emphasized as the doctrine of God is central to the theological belief of those within the evangelical tradition. God is perceived to exist as the Trinity in a communion of three persons of the Godhead—the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Boff (1988:25) points out that the Scriptures give the revelation of the Trinity. This is a reality and a fact (before the Christ event in the Old Testament and revealed through Christ in the New Testament). He observes that the names of the Persons in the Trinity vary but they all indicate the same reality (:9). However, a theological reflection on the models, symbolism and analogies eminent in the Trinity can facilitate alternative theological discourses for transformative praxis among evangelicals toward male-female relations. It is to this truth I argue that deep dogmatic understanding of the Trinity in liturgies is not useful if evangelicals cannot appropriate its message to daily living in the community.

Doubtfully, certain currents of feminist theologies have hypothesised that the implication of a “male-God” has not only been “offensive” but disastrous to women. In this case, they argue that the Trinity has posed major theological problems and questions for feminist theologians. For instance, Williams states:

“All the evils that have resulted from dignifying one sex and degrading the other may be traced to the central error of: a belief in a Trinity of masculine Gods in one, from which the feminine element is wholly eliminated. It has a Father, a male figure, and a son, equally male and to make matters worse, the Holy Spirit must probably be seen in male terms” (2005:51).

In their quest for transformation, feminist theologians have made proposals for alternatives from a feminism perspective. Abby’s proposal is for a theology that recognizes both the maleness as well as the femaleness of God [that is, God as both Father and mother] (2001:154). Clifford explores the interrelationship of God images and gender attitudes on the connection between God symbolism and biblically rooted

belief that humans, male and female are made in the image of God (2005:97). Citing Elizabeth Johnson, Rakoczy argues for the re-imagining of the Trinity in *Sophia* symbolism that brings a contemplation of God as One: *She who is* (2004:74). As a result, women believe that they find a friend and companion who “encourages them to overcome” looking at the femininity of God in Sophia (wisdom). She becomes healer of women bruised by violence, the heart of community (:75). However, Ruether seems dissatisfied in settling for such concepts (1983:60). She insists on images of God that are transformative, pointing us back to our authentic potential and forward to new redeemed possibilities (:69).

It is to such a task that evangelical scholarship must embark on transformative Trinitarian theologies as alternatives that push people to praxis in a context of oppression. The Trinity is rich in its message of redemption and transformation for individual relationships and the society as a whole. It is imperative to emphasise that the existing metaphors for God have nothing to do with the physical form or the gender of God. Abby argues that anthropocentric images of God are there to enhance how God relates to us (2001:148). “God is Spirit” (John 4:24 NRST) but at the same time not impersonal (but a spiritual being) rather than a physical being; who happens to choose male and female as the representation of the divine’s image and likeness. This is to say, all images of God are analogies. Since our cultures have socialized us in terms of “personhood”—male or female, we fall into the trap of masculinising God every instance we think of God. God is beyond gender and we need to conceive God in genderless terms. However, Oduyoye argues that we cannot ignore the fact that while there are many non-gender specific and functional names of God, there are specific male appellations and other references to God that attribute gender, some male others female (2001:43). In their struggle to understand God as African women Oduyoye emphatically states:

“Attributes said to be feminine and others said to be masculine are all applied to God. While there are specifically male and specifically female imagery of the Sources Being to be found in Africa, under the influences of Christianity and Islam a patriarchal God has been enthroned, in whose name women who pray to God as ‘God our Mother’ are victimised” (2001:43)

Crucial to other scholars, creating God in any form of image is absolute idolatry—“not to make any graven images” (Tappa 1986:101; Abbey 2001:149; Ruether 1983:66-67).

Irrespective of gender, as alternatives for transformation, the Trinity presents images and theologies of communion, interpenetration, relationship and a community of vision. The three persons of the Trinity perform different functions but are united as one being. This therefore stresses the ***being-in-relationship*** since the language of the three persons

affirms themselves as "One being." The being-in-relationship indicates one substance that interpenetrates (connects) all three persons. The implication therefore is that human beings created in the image and likeness of God (the Trinity)—Genesis 1:27, irrespective of gender, are of the same substance with each other and with the Trinity that they represent as female and male. This relationship portrays a model of communion of love and unity that should exist between members of the family extending to the society just as with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Boff on a similar notion argues that the Trinity as three Persons together forms the family of God, within which everything is bound up in the same circle of life, just as in a human family (1988:106). This therefore implies that the interplay of love, life and interpersonal relations within the Trinity must be reflected in human interpersonal and social relations, reworking transformation in our abusive and oppressive contexts. It is on the basis of such that Boff states: "The Trinity seems to offer a response to the great quest of participation, equality and communion that fires the understanding of the oppressed" (1988:11). Hence, the relationships of communion and participation of male and female as equals without biasness incorporates a theological alternative for transforming relationships.

Boff (1988:119) speaks of the Godhead imaging the Trinity as a community. He contends that God is a community of Persons and not simply one. This therefore aids the concept of the ***Trinity as a community*** which is a pointer to the desired human community where all have different appropriations but are equal. For instance, Boff observes that in the Trinity, the aspect of creator is attributed to God the Father; the aspect of redeemer is God the Son and in the aspect of sanctifier and giver of eternal life is attributed to the Spirit (:120-121). In this picture of community we find a transformative vision from the three Persons clearly bringing out the community and social aspect of the Trinity: unity and diversity shade into communion in God. This by itself is liberative in that the domination model is replaced by the communion (mutual acceptance), a model that seeks equality. The search for equality based on the framework of Trinitarian theology calls evangelicals to stand in place of God who seeks justice. The liberative vision of the Trinity is emphasised by Fortune who sees the "God-within-and-among" stands with the oppressed and over against the oppressor. The God who suffers with the suffering of the people, God who calls account to those who harm others (2005:14). Liberation (redemption/salvation) as a concept calls for a faith commitment that engages the need for the kingdom and the reign of God (justice and righteousness) to prevail in every social sphere.

I contend that praxis can only be effected when the world is explained starting from the Trinity. Hence, the relationship within the Trinity becomes the ground for deconstructing the dynamics of domination and abuse of power in a society. In the case of domestic

violence and abuse, power is used to dominate and manipulate those with who the perpetrators are in relationship. Contrary to relations of domination, the Trinity presents a model/image that promotes mutuality, partnership and transformative sharing. There is no hierarchical order in the Trinity as an appropriate model for all relationships. The three persons are different but none is above the other. In case of human relations, this implies that the husband and the wife are equal. As Williams suggests, there is a difference in role, but just as with the very different role of the father, Son and Spirit in the Trinity, is due to a relational, and by no means a value of difference (2000:59). Williams further asserts that God the Father does not use power to control, dominate and oppress the other two Persons of the Trinity. The Trinity uses power in costly-giving and service to humanity seen in works of redemption on the Cross (:59). Sawyer (2005:19) has argued that God does not exercise “power over” people but uses power to enable. The Trinitarian model is therefore an inspiration towards the exercise of power to develop the weak, liberate the oppressed, and to create a better society for all.

### **7.2.3 Theologies of transition and transformation**

I have used the these terms—theologies of transition and transformation to argue for discourses that envision theological alternatives for deliberate reversal and destruction of the paradigm of domination modeled on the life, the teachings, and the ministry of Christ as examples to be imitated by men in our contemporary times. In her quest towards a theological reflection on issues facing African women, Oduyoye insists on a theology of transition and transformation. She argues that this envisions making more apparent the “image of God in African womanhood and the affirmation of the reign of God in Africa” (1996:112-113). I contend that this “reimaging” of God in African womanhood can only be achieved through praxis exemplified by Christ. Borrowing June O’Connor’s assertions I argue that theologies of transition and transformation would embrace what she has grouped as the three Rs of rereading, reconceiving and reconstructing religious traditions<sup>60</sup> (In King 2000:14-15). It is from such that the following are proposed as alternative evangelical discourses towards theologies of transition and transformation for praxis among evangelicals.

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<sup>60</sup> By “**rereading**” the traditions she means re-examining religious materials and traditions with an eye attuned to recognition given and denied to women. “**Reconceiving**” involves reclaiming women’s heritage linked with the development of a “critical hermeneutics of liberation” which will involve several moments of “suspicion, proclamation, remembrance, historical reconstruction ritualisation and celebration.” Theological “**reconstruction**” would involve reconstructing the past on the bases of the new information and the use of historical imagination and employing new paradigms for thinking, seeing and understanding.

### **7.2.3.1 A Kenōsis of *maleness* modeled on Christlike servanthood**

The attitude and the relationship of Christ towards women in his time was revolutionary. He transformed structures of domination; broke cultural boundaries of oppression and established grounds for equality between female and male as God's image. Some of the ways through which he did this was through his practical acts of servanthood. His liberating role as *Son of man* who came "not to be served but to serve" (Matthew 20:25-28) did not lord it over others. His servanthood is depicted in his humbling act of washing the disciple's feet (John 13:4-15 NRST). As the second person of the Trinity, Coakley (2002:3) observes that Christ's kenōsis (voluntary self-emptying) offers a challenge to patriarchy. Christ's complete self-emptying (Philippians 2:6-11) must therefore be looked at as a kenōsis of *maleness* that sets a standard as a model that dethrones domination and oppression by men as husbands, calling all Christians, not just women, to a life of service and servanthood.

Chapter six argued that Christian suffering modeled on the life of Christ portrays expressions of evangelical theology that expects women to be "suffering servants." This probes questions as to whether men are excluded from Christlike self-giving and servanthood. African women theologians have raised similar concerns as to why servanthood and a life of permanent, unchosen kenōsis of sacrifice exemplified in Christ has only been equated to womanhood? (Rakoczy 2004:110; 220). Contrary to this, it is observed that Paul's instruction for husbands to love their wives just as Christ loved the church and *gave himself up for her* (Ephesians 5:25 NRSV) is a call that envisions a kenōsis of *maleness* and Christlike servanthood from men. This, if rightly practiced among evangelicals, will be transformative and liberating as well. The role of helper and servant is therefore for all within the community of faith. I concur with Rakoczy who dreams of a Christian community that is filled with the Spirit of the risen Lord, where friends serve each other freely with love; an evangelical community that continues that presence of Christ in the world through a life that clearly demonstrates that it enfleshes the teachings and praxis of Christ (2004:110).

### **7.2.3.2 Mutual submission based on the "priesthood of all believers"**

Exemplified on Christ's interactions with women, evangelicals must not underestimate the role of women in the church and in the home. Christ's interaction with women as God indicates the special place that women hold in God's household of faith. Having women disciples (Mary surnamed Magdalene, Joanna the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, Susanna and several others who ministered to them out of their own resources—Luke 8:2-3; Mark 15:40-41; and Matthew 27:55-56 NRST), travelling openly with a male

“rabbi” in the Jewish context was a breach of custom but at the same time a radical proclamation of what **discipleship of equals**<sup>61</sup> meant in the new Yeshua movement. The inclusion of women in the reign of God’s kingdom must have been transformative and revolutionary especially in a context that the threefold daily rabbinic prayer stated:

Praise be to God that he has not created me a Gentile! Praise be to God the he has not created me a woman! Praise be to God that he has not created me a slave! (Swidler 2007:233).

Through the baptism of all believers in Christ, Paul likewise spells out the same tone of assertion on what it means for all to be equal as followers of Christ—hence a “**priesthood of all believers**.”<sup>62</sup> This indicated that in the Christian sphere the religious distinction between male and female, along with the religious distinctions which existed between Jew and Gentile (Greek), and slave and free no longer existed. All are to be equal. Declaring equality in the context of Paul’s Jewish and Greco-Roman Empire was a radical revolutionary statement by Paul envisioned bringing transformation in his patriarchal dominated context. In fact Browning suggests that family members under such conditions (*baptised* into Jesus’ movement as a new household of God—my addition), would literally disclaim each other, resulting in the arrest and jailing of the so called Christians by the civil authority (2007:177).

The same is required of evangelicals. As the Jesus movement became a missionary movement to the Greco-Roman world with evidence of equality in God’s household of faith, so must evangelicals labor by the same Spirit in the context of patriarchal church systems and family structures. Evangelicals have applied the term “priesthood of all believers” without observing its meaning especially to women as equal to men in God’s household of faith and in the family. As such, spiritual violence has been cited as pervasive among evangelicals. If all are baptized in the name of the same God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), then what makes it impossible for the same God to empower female and male equally with gifts of the Spirit for service of the church? Until all truly become equal disciples of Christ then there can never be the liberating presence of Christ who calls all to be disciples in God’s kingdom. On the basis of Christ’s model that replaces domination by participation, Edwards (1995:187) argues that Christ demonstrates an alternative—a totally different paradigm of relationship: which he terms as **mutual participation**. I contend that this is what is meant by “priesthood of all believers” in this context. Among evangelicals, this mutuality of participation must radically challenge the social, religious and cultural restrictions that enable the revision

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<sup>61</sup> Browning asserts that the pre-Markan and pre-Q fragments of the Gospels depict the early Jesus movement as “a discipleship of equals” between men and women (2007:177). Using Fiorenza’s work to affirm that the church is to be made up of “discipleship of equals,” Rakoczy asserts that there is a new kingship relationship of equality since all are following the one Christ and serving one another (2004:218).

<sup>62</sup> Galatians 3:27-28.

of ecclesiological theology and family values to encompass an inclusive community. However, as Rakoczy indicates, this is challenging since all Christian bodies, including those in Africa, are challenged to affirm the human and faith dignity of all its members, women as well as men (2004:219).

In seeking for mutual participation, one of Paul's injunctions that are normally used against evangelicals who accept an egalitarian and a relationship of mutual interdependence is 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.<sup>63</sup> Based on such texts and other similar texts in this context (see footnote 46), women have been supposed as inferior and subordinate, in reference to Paul's theology for the wife and the husband in relation to the household code on headship and submission (refer to chapter five). The dual position of Paul raises problems of contradiction which have yet to be resolved among scholars. Owanikin argues that Paul's injunction on women could be due to his Jewish background and his love for respect and orderliness in the church (1992:216). Even though ambiguity is read in some portions of Paul's Epistles on instructions for marriage, to which scholars like Owanikin ascribe cultural influence, a contention can be raised that Paul was totally anti-women. In fact, Paul's instruction for all to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ hence—*mutual submission* (Ephesians 5:21) must have been radical, revolutionary and transformative in his Roman and Jewish context. This was against the honor-shame code of the early Christian house church as Browning (2007:181) observes. The honor-shame code in the Roman Hellenistic culture gave the father of the household honor if he rightly exercised domination in his private sphere over his wife, children, mother, sisters, and slaves. But he was liable to shame if his private sphere was threatened due to lack of control, authority, protection and dominion (Browning 2007:181-186). Hence, in the same way that Paul's theology of *mutual submission* was aimed at fracturing the honor-shame code, evangelicals require praxis that will enhance mutual submission and interdependence between husband and wife and fracture the abusive contexts of oppression and violence that women are subjected to in the evangelical context. As Bruteau argues (in Edwards 1995:187) this is a new paradigm of social relationship which replaces dominion and submission through what

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<sup>63</sup> Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you. **3** But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. **4** Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, **5** but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as if her head were shaven. **6** For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head. **7** For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. **8** For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. **9** Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. **10** That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. **11** Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; **12** for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God. **13** Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? **14** Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, **15** but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. **16** If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God. (English Standard Version)

she terms as “the communion paradigm.” In short, husbands are to fulfill their servant roles by treating their wives as equal to their own bodies. Therefore, mutuality according to Cooper-White, emphasises empowering each other to find and express what each can truly know and do, each one’s unique contributions, not the dulling uniformity of the lowest common denominator (1995:30). This can be transformative among evangelicals.

#### **7.2.4 Reconstructing “violent masculinities” to “mature masculinity”**

Concepts of masculinity are a great social and cultural contributor on how men understand themselves and their relations to women in the society. It can be argued that violence, abuse and oppression in the context of gender relations are mainly effects of such concepts that emphasise polarisation that are subsumed on the dichotomisation of female/male differences. *Maleness* as a discourse of masculinity under this context therefore incorporates the consequent perception of superiors/inferiors, strong/weak and dominant/submissive. Based on these perceptions, scholars have defined masculinity differently.<sup>64</sup> However, the thread that weaves all of these definitions is that masculinity is a social and cultural construction that defines ideological identities of men in a society. In other words, for many of us, defining masculinity would entail identifying what defines *maleness* or what a man is supposed to be. In the context of the subject of study in this dissertation, it would be unjust not to mention that religion also contributes to the process of masculinisation and has been used as a tool to justify some social and cultural ideologies that are presumed to be true and God ordained. It is therefore important to look at some perceptions of masculinity within the evangelical context.

Wilson in his discourses on shaping masculinity—*Future Men* (2001:9-42) points at how biblical manhood must seek to shape boyhood. According to his arguments on distinctive features of the masculine constitution, he insists that godly discipline for fathers is disciplining their sons into a culture of exercising dominion as a response to the cultural mandate, in Genesis 1:26-28. According to his understanding as an evangelical this entails that man was created to exercise dominion on earth, and for effeminacy and biblical masculinity, young men must be trained: (1) to exercise dominion [be *Lords* on earth] (2001:14); (2) to be *husbandmen* [men created to *conquer* and *subdue*] (Genesis 2:15) (:15); (3) to be *saviors* [men must have a desire to *deliver* or *save* (:15) and

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<sup>64</sup> According to Leach “masculinity” is a form of self-identity that includes personal attitudes and behaviors that can be viewed as a form of ideology comprised of complex cultural ideals that define appropriate roles, values and expectations for and of men (Quoted in Swart 2005:40). Segal defines “masculinity” as a construct of culture and socialization, which is divergent, contradictory, inconsistent, and with no fixed and inherent identity or character (Cited in Rankhatha 2002:18). This indicates that different masculinities have been constructed in time and history, particular to the specific social context. Rankhatha identifies hegemonic masculinity as the “configuration of gender practices which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell quoted in Rankhatha 2002:19).

(4) to be *glory-bearers* [men are created to be the glory of God] (:17). He finally states:

“Because these things are true, boys (*young men*) must be instructed on how to grow up to into glory and how to fulfill their responsibility to be *representative, responsible* and *holy*” (2001:18) [words bracketed are my addition].

In his discourse of what a real man—“true masculinity” is supposed to be, Wilson cautions against men being unmasculine terming it as a sin (2001:22) since a man’s *authority* must come naturally (:23). Based on God’s traditional command (to dominate) which he terms as cultural mandate (:30), must be recognised as a masculine vocation in the world (:31). He climaxes with his emphasis that women were created to be led by a strong man since women on one level want to rule their husbands (citing the results of the fall—God telling Eve that her desire will be for her husband; Genesis 3:16) (:31).

If evangelicals sanction such aspects of constructing “godly” or Christian masculinity, it proves needful that we engage a theological reconstruction (a recreating) of what masculinity means. In as much as God created male and female to take dominion, it is contentious if such constructions of *maleness* will not result in violent masculinities in Christian homes as has been argued through our case study as portrayed through expressions of evangelical theology. A long tradition of feminist scholarship has identified a high correlation between violence against women and rigidly defined gender categories which contain definitions of masculinity associated with dominance, toughness, control and male authority in the home. Swart observes that research in South Africa indicates that South Africa has always been a “man’s country” where men exercised power publicly, privately and politically (2005:42). He further argues that conditions that constitute a high risk of violence are those in which male dominance is threatened (:48). One of those areas that men feel threatened is in their role as providers and being responsible as breadwinners for their families. Arguably, if a man is challenged as the head of the household, then masculinity could become problematic since ideologically men are conditioned that women be “dependants.” A sense of insecurity results when men do not provide. Segal (in Sideris, 2005), points out that men’s fear of not being male enough, their fears of dependence, vulnerability to intimacy, are central to violence in intimate heterosexual relationships especially where the norms and customs sanction violent behavior (In Swart 2005:48).

What this amounts to is a need for theologies that will foster a construction of “**mature masculinities**” as an alternative for transformation. Mature masculinities for authentic manhood are found in the use of power to empower others. It seeks to support and develop others rather than dominate and oppress others. Mature masculinities protects and takes constructive responsibilities. At the heart of mature masculinity, [I borrow

Piper's suggestions (1991:38-44)], is recreating expressions of mature men that must not demand to be served, but masculinity that needs to express itself in the strength to serve and sacrifice not only for the good of women but for the entire community and God's creation. Mature masculinity must not assume the authority of Christ over women but advocate for it; it does not presume superiority, but mobilizes the strength of others for a just society; it advocates for a leadership that stands for the voiceless and the oppressed, aiming to empower the weak and the marginalised. These types of masculinities if applied into praxis will be transformative.

In deconstructing *violent masculinities* to *mature masculinities* <sup>65</sup> as a theory is not enough. Hence, a practical implementation of reconstructed values of **partnership** praxis in Christian relationships is vital. Partnership of equals is therefore an articulation of values that promote a more authentic ethic of human relationship. Mature masculinities in this case will uphold partnership of partners as opposed to hierarchicalism of headship/submission ideologies where the husband is the master and the wife is a servant or the husband is superior and the wife is inferior. Such are the grounds that influence abuse and violence. This does not mean that we are doing away with leadership in the marriage and family. If the male, in the context of marriage is to be the leader of the family, a partnership of equals (wife and husband having full range of human capacities) must be emphasised. This requires this leadership to be God honouring. This is leadership of the male-female in mutual partnership emphasising mutual submission to one another—from the husband as male and the wife and female, both as equals in God through Christ in whom there is neither female or male. It is leadership in the family in a partnership of humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love. It is a partnership where the husband and the wife make decisions as equals in God, not belittling the other in any way. Life in the twenty-first century Africa where gender roles are changing will require couples to exercise partnership in the family where both the partners seek to shape fulfilling lives for each other. It is at this point that men need to be imitators of Christ where headship becomes servanthood as exemplified in Christ's kenōsis of emptying himself of authority in order to be a servant. I contend that women have been servants to *maleness* for a long time. It is time that evangelicals introduce a new paradigm of mutual submission and partnership as praxis among its faith community. Through such, issues of poverty, AIDs and the likes will be dealt with equally not only by women. Ruether in suggesting partnership as an alternative argues for a relationship based on the equality of men and women in family, flourishing through and with one another rather than at the expense

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<sup>65</sup> Coming from the word *masculism*, masculinism as a theory is thinking and acting in a way that does not necessarily discriminate solely based on physical gender. This is considered by some to describe the belief that the male and female genders should be considered complimentary and interdependent by necessity. <http://www.knowledgerush.com/kr/encyclopedia/Masculinism/>

of one another (2001:208). This is an alternative that is transformative if engaged in praxis. It is important to note that this is problematic to most evangelicals who believe in complementarity as God's design for female and male relationship.

At the heart of recreating mature masculinities is the need to deconstruct gender imbalances of power in relationships. Power has been defined simply as the ability to bring about desired result, to determine outcomes even against opposition (Hartman 2001:115). All those who experience domestic violence (physical, spiritual, emotional, psychological, verbal, and sexual abuse) are victims of abuse of power mainly through patriarchal structures and ideology. Contemporary feminism has critiqued a male power that prescribes social relationships of dominance and inequality that result in exploitation and male supremacy over women in society. Redecop for instance argues that throughout the modern period, Christianity comes under fire for abuse of power over women as a group (2001:45). It is important to determine how masculine power is reinforced and maintained. Citing Whitehead and Barrett, Nadar identifies three ways in which dynamics of power turn abusive to women where the first is power as brute force expressed through physical violence. The second is power as relational and positional through a belief system that promote hierarchical ideologies which makes it obligatory for men to be the heads of homes, leaders of organizations, companies and the like. The third way in which they show that masculine power is maintained is through "discourses of power"—referring to the everyday language used to maintain binary oppositions such as men are strong, women are weak (Unpublished paper presented in Stellenbosch, June 2009:6).

A theology that will foster transformation in this case is one that will deconstruct the reinforcement of abusive male power that promotes structures and systems of dehumanisation. The question is not whether power is exercised or even whether power wielders have a legitimate right to do so. I concur with Hartman (2001:117) that the crucial question must be that of justice and accountability. This means that each individual has the responsibility of being accountable for the power that he or she has the authority to exercise. Looking at the typology of power dynamics, evangelicals need to deconstruct *power-over* (Nyce 2001:165) where one person gains strength through reducing and oppressing others [the ideology of lordship]. Nyce proposes *power-to* as an alternative where individuals are "empowered" to rise from a position of comparative powerlessness to one of comparative equality standing free and firm (:165). Cooper-White (1995:31) proposes *power-with* and *power-within* as formulations of power that prizes mutuality over control and operates by negotiation and consensus embodying justice, responsibility and care. These paradigms of power could be utilised as alternative that will furnish discourses on mature masculinities and the use of power not to

dominate and oppress but to bring transformation. The envisioned change is only possible through applying the discourses and practically doing the theology as praxis among evangelicals.

### **7.2.5 Rethinking the theology of sin in the context of violence and abuse**

A quest for transformative praxis brings with it the need to rethink the theology of sin among evangelicals. Evangelicals often define themselves in terms of theological commitments and statements of faith. For instance, *Harmartiology*<sup>66</sup> (the doctrine of sin) remains central to evangelical theology. The evangelical tradition throughout the Christian theology has held on the doctrine of original sin which developed an understanding of the consequences of that first Adamic sin. Developed on Augustine's ideas, most theologians believe that Adam and Eve were historical figures and that all their descendants have inherited the penalty of their "original sin."<sup>67</sup> In chapter six of this dissertation (page 68) I cited Buckenham's argument that observed that abused women in trying to understand the cause and source of their suffering make sense out of their experiences of abuse through the old-fashioned explanation (1991:244). In this case, a theology of sin emerges where the victim of abuse seeks to explain her current experiences of suffering in terms of a previous "sinful" act. The belief is that God is currently judging and punishing her for such sins. The theology of sin in this case remains on an individualistic sphere wrongly perceived and enhances the circle of abuse. An examination of Christian theology and tradition indicates that theologians developed categories of sin. Reinhold Niebuhr developed a helpful analysis of how human nature as created generates the conditions of sin's possibility, which he boiled down and called *pride*. He later wrote of "*sensuality*" (Plaskow 1980:58-59). Karl Barth spoke of "*sloth*"—the sin of failing to wake up to what God has called us to be (Placher 2003:140). The contemporary American theologian Dunfee and others talk about the "*sin of hiding*,"—referring to the moment in the story of the garden when Adam and Eve hide from God [a good metaphor for women and men hiding from their own God-given potential] (:140). These concepts of the doctrine of sin have therefore extensively shaped evangelical definition of sin which is mainly directed to the traditional focus as sin of pride; what I refer to as "individual sin." What this amounts to is a deep consciousness entrenched among evangelicals that sin is what we commit as individuals in our private life roles,

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<sup>66</sup> Harmartiology comes from the Greek words, *Harmartia* meaning sin and *logos* meaning word or discourse (Conner 1980:133). Thus, Harmartiology is the Biblical teaching concerning sin, its origin, definition and final end.

<sup>67</sup> Augustine argued that Adam was free to sin or not to sin but chose to sin. Hence, through the bad will of that one man all sinned in him. In the shame of with which Adam and Eve covered their genitals with leaves, Augustine found his explanation: Sin turns love to lust, and thereby the sexual intercourse by which each of us is conceived passes down that inheritance of original sin (Placher 2003:139).

leading to personal guilt and shame. The use of the word "sin" has therefore been much privatised in that all we imagine of as good evangelicals is "not missing the mark." This, however, brings to our attention the fact that human beings within them have potential for violence and abuse. Hence, in as much as sin is personal (not denying its seriousness); there is need to rethink various categories and concepts of sin that expands and enhances our theological discourses about the nature of sin. This will affect evangelical theological alternatives for transformative praxis.

Evangelicals and their theologians must engage male violence, abuse and oppression against women. This begins by probing questions that lead to reflections intending to justify their relevance in the modern world. As the dissertation has argued, the prominent discourses that correlate to abuse and violence have portrayed expressions of evangelical theology. Dynamics of power, dominance and control are not exceptions as possible influences that contribute to constructions of *maleness* in the society. The constructs of what true masculinity and maleness is, compound to what has been assembled and structured socially, culturally or religiously. In such instances, the society has socialized and gendered men to be aggressive, possessive, dominant and even apply physical strength in order to be "real men." This results in a strong emphasis that a woman must be subordinate and is only complete through a union with a man. Women, on the other hand have been conditioned to believe that they are inferior to men despite the religious assertions that all are equal and created in the image of God. As much as we have named male abusive and oppressive behavior as sinful, it is vital to rethink the traditional focus of sin for transformative praxis.

Rethinking sin as evangelicals, calls theologians not only to look at the concept of the original sin that personalises and makes sin private but also public. My argument above indicates that sin can either be socially and culturally structured and constructed or religiously institutionalised. This brings our discourse of sin as a **corruption that leads to evil** in the society and hence denies and oppresses life through structures and systems of injustices, subordination and marginalisation. Such should also be defined as "sin"—alienation, brokenness and estrangement from God, which leads to our alienation from others.<sup>68</sup> This corruption retards life from flourishing as God intended for all creation. I therefore begin looking at categories of sin through the lenses of religion, culture and institution. I am indebted to the eighteenth-century philosopher Immanuel Kant who attributed a radical evil to human nature without tying it at all to a historical Adam and Eve (Quoted in Placher 2003:140). Further still, greatly indebted to the nineteenth

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<sup>68</sup> Fortune observes that too often "sin" focuses on piestic and moralistic religious beliefs. This is based on an ethical system that emphasises rules and regulations about specific acts (2005:13). There is a need as evangelicals to shift discourses of sin from the paradigm of ethical language of wrong and harm to that of the theological language of sin where we are able to place discourses in the context of brokenness.

century American social gospel theologian—Walter Rauschenbusch who said:

“Original sin means simply the way in which everyone born into a corrupt society would naturally pick up aspects of its corruption” (Quoted in Placher 2003:140).

Sawyer argues that we should consider that there is always an interplay of many factors (individual choice, action and inaction, structural and corporate action and experiences) when looking at sin (2005:20). This implies that sin can be expressed as part of a social system and/or social expectations which trap individuals. I hereby note patriarchy as an example. Since human life (the personal) is social and corporate—strongly emphasised in the bible, and the private is political—strongly emphasised by feminism (Fiorenza (1985:10), the evangelical theological discourse of sin as an alternative for transformation should compel all to a theology that questions cultural, religious and institutionalised evils as sin that alienates from others and God. For instance, Fortune applies the theological notion of sin as a dimension of human experience and urges us to consider the ethical notion of “sins” as the individual or collective acts that bring suffering to others (2005:14). This therefore is an indication that evangelical theologies must be bold through praxis that will deprivatise the understanding and discourses of sin publicly. For instance, evangelical theology must address the gender imbalances in social circumstances that affect women and find practical action for equality. Evangelical theologies must confront cultural ideologies that determine a man’s behavior of possessing a woman as his property. Evangelical theologies must speak out against family upbringings, and affirm responsibility. Based on the communal character of life, evangelical theologies must be able to name domestic violence, abuse and oppression against women as sin and evil not only against women but against God in whose image women are created. I am using “theologies” in this case because there can never be a single theological formula once true praxis of theology is actualised. For a long time evangelicals have not addressed abuse and oppression of women as a cultural, religious and as a social sin. Maybe because a majority of evangelical men are guilty of such sins. However, silence from evangelicals could be interpreted to mean that the church and its theologians have failed to address one of the most common experiences of evil among its own members.

### **7.3 The “how question” of transformative praxis**

The big question that still remains among evangelicals is the “how question.” How can evangelicals apply some of these theologies for transformation? I suggest that this is an area of further research not only for feminist theologians but for evangelical scholars as well. At this point I would like to refute an understanding among feminist and African

women theologians as well on the argument that runs across most of their work that if women are liberated men will automatically be. Ackermann as a good example states:

“The church has a long way to go in dealing with gender issues and their effects on people and ministry. Women’s liberation is an ongoing struggle and is deeply connected to the liberation of men as well. No man can be liberated as long as women are not” (In Klein 2004:42).

Contending from a male point of view I suggest that theologians, female and male alike, must start looking at things from a different perspective. This is to mean: No woman can be liberated as long men are not liberated. For instance, African women theologians have been engaging praxis from their perspective that seems to presume that if women are liberated, it means men are liberated. The evidence of oppression that still exists suggests that we have a long way to go. It is okay for instance to sensitize women of their oppression and conduct community Bible studies as contextual process of liberation, but if no praxis is directed to men’s attitudes and ideologies nothing will change. Does this mean I am divorcing the need for collaborative partnership that African women theologians have been working towards? This is not the case. It is only until men are truly liberated that the struggle to achieve the liberation of women will be accomplished. Until then, I suggest that liberating men must be our top priority in the agenda of transformative praxis in our society.

What I am suggesting in my “how question” for transformative praxis is that men among the evangelical faith community must labor towards changing other men. Although women are already spearheading the initiative for a different society, men with similar passions to see change in society where God is at reign must practically engage other men for change. I believe that this could be receptive from the male camp unlike when men feel that it is predominantly a “women’s agenda” to change their *maleness*. Therefore:

Firstly, the pulpit as a “male” domain should be used by transformed male pastors to initiate transformative praxis to other men in their congregations. Sermons will not be enough. There has to be a thorough campaign from transformed male pastors in engaging other men in men groups within evangelical communities where the Bible will be used as a resource of learning and critiquing male dominated ideologies and traditional attitudes against women in the evangelical tradition, in culture and in the socio-political spheres. For instance, in the FGC in Phoenix, interpretations and hermeneutics of inclusivity will be a vital point to begin at as a transformative praxis for changing other men.

Secondly, there is a lacking in proper marital and pre-marital counseling skills among

some (not all) evangelical pastors. Education and training of pastors for transformative practical pastoral engagement is a needful praxis. For instance, if couples go through a proper premarital process of counseling before marriage, abusive masculinities can be challenged, oppression and violence must not be encouraged, power imbalances in marriage must be tackled. As observed in this chapter from my theological reflection, partnership, equality, mutual submission, discipleship of equals, servanthood and the like must openly be discussed by the pre-marital and marriage counselor who I assume will already be a transformed male or female clergy. In the case of FGC in Phoenix, couples seminars could be used to address and implement some of these concerns. Mature masculinities are to be stressed for husbands as a requisite for a healthy marriage relationship. This is urgently needed among evangelicals as faith communities.

Thirdly, men in the evangelical context need to be engaged in practical simple commitment in the context of marriage relationships. Fracturing domination that results in oppression will not be a one night task. Liberated and transformed men in positions of leadership in the church among evangelicals need to initiate involvement praxis where men can be human in a real world. What this may involve is: how does it feel to be a wife and be served by your husband? Applied in the context of the FGC in Phoenix this could require men to practically take those roles that they have been socialized to believe are feminine and domesticated for women who are supposed to be inferior. This may involve, cooking, taking care of the kids, making the bed, washing dishes and so on. This can also be initiated among men groups seeking transformative praxis for men.

Fourthly, I contend that evangelicals must not divorce the "law" from grace. As an evangelical I might be sounding "untheological" but what I mean is that in case of abuse, take for instance as observed in the case study of the FGC, the church should bring male perpetrators to account and be responsible for their wrong doings. Evangelical structures must not favor men in silencing women to be submissive to a man who is violent and oppressive. Structures of discipleship and church discipline need to be effective and taken seriously in order to "rehabilitate" abusive men if possible and to set an example to other men as well. This may require the support of the law and the Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998 (De Gruchy 2008/2009:133), if need be.

Hence, in answering what alternative transformative praxis would be like in this case, I suggest that praxis is informed by a transformative theology and alternative discourses. Having engaged with what transformative theology is and having known what they are, evangelicals should use the same to change structures, institutional systems, religious barriers, and abusive cultural ideologies. Nickoloff's argument on praxis is transformative

in itself. He pointedly frames theology<sup>69</sup> as the intellectual understanding of a commitment. He argues that theology is not first; the commitment must come first because theology is the understanding of the commitment and the commitment is action (1996:25). In other words, theology only comes in the process of taking practical praxis for change and transformation. This is a process that Ackermann terms as: "Theory to praxis and praxis to theory, all the time" (Klein 2004:52).

## Conclusion

Finding the right balance for human relationships is an enormous if not an impossible task. The same is with theology and praxis. The social, religious and cultural issues that we are addressing are deeply rooted in Christian tradition, theology and in philosophical ideologies that it seems next to impossible to penetrate and offer excessive alternatives for transformation. However, this chapter has explored and proposed theological discourses as recourses that could be employed in search of transformative praxis. Suggestions can be made but theology is not transformative if it is not worked out into "doing theology." This demands a practical engagement. If domestic violence is to be alleviated, then men must be better engaged in the process of implementing alternative transformative praxis as this chapter has argued. In order to find long lasting solutions that stem the tide of violence and develop effective mechanisms, we need practical programs, and structures that keep women and children safe. Evangelicals have an enormous task of investing in, and developing new perspectives in men. The next chapter concludes this study addressing its outcomes and areas that requires further research in the context of this study.

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<sup>69</sup> Nickoloff (1996:24) argues that etymologically speaking, **theology** is a treatise of discourse about God—the classical meaning of theology being an intellectual understanding of the faith (or faith that is seeking understanding). In other words, it is the effort of human intelligence to comprehend revelation and the vision of faith. However, this must not stop there. Theologians must constantly ask themselves: "Why am I engaged in this particular theological orientation?" If this "so what question" cannot be answered translated into the "so how" transformative praxis, then I think engaging change will be deficient.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CONCLUSIONS AND GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study on, "Examining the Social Religious and Cultural Discourses on '*maleness*' and its influence on domestic violence in South Africa: A critique of some expressions of evangelical theology" began with an attempt to examine the existing literature on the nature and forms of the social, religious and cultural discourses on notions of the image of God—hence "*maleness*." The dissertation has engaged a theological reflection as its methodology and has addressed its hypothesis on the need to theologically examine abuse and oppression of women within the evangelical context in South Africa by exploring how God, imaged (imagined) as "male" and how discourses on "*maleness*" leads to paradigms of male power and domination that eventually could influence violence abuse and oppression of women in the evangelical context in South Africa.

In addressing its research problem and questions, the dissertation has argued that the predominant social, religious and cultural discourses portray some expressions of evangelical theology. The dissertation has tentatively found that the social, religious and cultural discourses on *maleness* have possible influence on domestic violence, abuse and oppression of women among some evangelicals. By examining some expressions of evangelical theology as portrayed in the Durban case study of the Full Gospel Church, the objectives of the study have been achieved through a theological reflection in every chapter. However, the findings of this study are limited in its scope of application based on its non-empirical methodology. Its findings therefore are tentative and cannot be applied to the general evangelical context in South Africa. The tentative conclusions arrived at are subject to further empirical research and investigation in the future.

Chapter One introduced the study and gave its general overview. It established the need for engaging a theological reflection that would specifically examine notions of *maleness* and its correlation to domestic violence, abuse and oppression of women from an evangelical perspective. This indicated the relevance of this research area with an expectation of adding to the body of existing academic literature.

Chapter Two set out the *feminist theology of praxis* as the theoretical framework of this study and the "mending of creation" as its theological concept that embraces liberation praxis. This framework has been necessary for this study due to its critical view in transforming human relations stressing the theo-ethical significance of values such as equality, wholeness, love, peace, the flourishing of righteousness against injustices and

oppression that focuses on changing societal structures which perpetuate all forms of separateness.

Chapter Three has provided an examination of domestic violence and abuse of women in the South African context. It has given relevant statistical data on the various forms of abuse in relation to domestic violence in South Africa by employing an interdisciplinary analysis of data. The case study of the FGC in Phoenix, Durban has permitted theological observations that have revealed the predominant discourses portrayed as expressions of evangelical theology. The chapter has indicated the significance of the Indian culture that must be taken into consideration at the heart of this study in relation to the context of this particular FGC.

Chapter Four confined the study within the evangelical tradition by giving us a historical synopsis of evangelicalism. The chapter cited literal interpretation of Scripture as the major methodology used by evangelicals. The chapter has argued that the literal hermeneutical process and the dominant masculine language in the Bible have influenced interpretations of texts that results to exclusive discourses of *maleness* since God is imaged as "male." The chapter argued that this has resulted in negative attitude towards the humanity of women contributing to abuse and oppression among evangelicals. A critique of the literal evangelical interpretation of Scripture as a methodology has emphasised the need for meaning. A search for those interpretations that are in accordance with the will of God, promoting wholeness and life is proposed.

Chapter Five has examined discourses of maleness and marriage. This has examined the household codes of male headship, authority and priesthood in relation to the intended subordinate position of women that demands submission. The imbalance of power that exposes inequality between partners has been identified to influence dominion of the husband over the wife resulting in abuse and oppression. Chapter Six took the study into examining the discourses of *maleness* in relation to Christian suffering and forgiveness. The chapter has established the concept of suffering in the evangelical tradition based on the classical theories of atonement. This chapter argued that these theories have influenced how Christians view suffering in relation to the cross. This has contributed to women experiencing violence and oppression to remain in abusive relationships with a belief that it is God's will for them to suffer. Christian teaching on forgiveness has also been identified as leading perpetrators of violence to demand forgiveness without being accountable and taking responsibility for their abuse. With the feeling to forgive, the victim is trapped into a cycle of abuse that leaves her with no room for healing.

Chapter Seven has explored alternative evangelical theological discourses and resources for transformation. It has emphasised the need for deconstruction and reconstruction. Chapter Eight has drawn the general conclusions and recommendations to the study.

To deal with gendered violence simply on the level of theorising and theologising is not enough. Martin Luther King Jr once stated: "It is those who are filled with the spirit of God who can bring unbelievable change in individual lives and the life of the society" (Quoted in Gathogo 2007:340). This highlights what the church as a unique community should aim to be. The church has a great role to play in addressing the male abusive and oppressive attitudes against women. Notions of masculinity, fatherhood, the role of men in relationships, the need for healthy relationships and the need to adhere to the full humanity of women are crucial issues. It is evidently clear that the church has left the battle of addressing violence, abuse and oppression of women entirely to feminists. In fact, evangelical theologies seem to reinforce oppressive ideologies and structures against women. Change is needful. It is one aspect of the game to theologise and propose alternative theologies for transformation as this study has done, and altogether another aspect to initiate praxis and action that will implement change and transformation. This requires evangelicals to get to a point of "doing" theology men to men. Further areas of research should look into formulating practical strategies to achieve theological alternatives as praxis otherwise we theologise in vain. This is my concern at the moment. How can we make men to be better persons? Yes we have proposed Christlike models, mature masculinities, and the rest. But, even among church leaders these alternatives seem not to exist. Young men have no models to imitate and mentors to lean on. I have argued for interpretations that enhance life, partnership, mutual submission in marriage and a rethinking of sin. But, unless our society becomes an inclusive society, then very little has been achieved in relation to gender relations.

It is from such that I recommend that men can play a great role in engaging other men, holding them accountable, responsible and supporting their development. There will be no transformation unless transformed men work towards positive change of other men to display God's reign of a mended (new) creation/community. Among evangelical men, there has to be discussions about the role of Scripture and how it has been interpreted and used in church teachings by men against women. It is clear that the same Scripture can be interpreted and used differently depending on who is discussing it. Transformed evangelical men who rightly believe that male and female are equal and that both are created in God's image and hold the same worth and value in God must discuss these life giving interpretations with other men who can respond and critique abusive theologies against women. Bible study groups can provide some examination of scripture and how it is used within the church. These opportunities are available through

structures already in place among the evangelicals. I also suggest church based workshops for church leaders to challenge their exclusive interpretation of the Bible. It will be transformative if transformed clergy use the pulpit in a more constructive way to teach their congregations new ways of being human and being male. These transformative practical actions apply to the FGC in Phoenix as well.

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