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Wheeling Time

“What is a workable concept of time from a feminist theological perspective?”

In partial fulfilment of the requirements of the M(Res) in Theology

Mrs Mirjam Murphy BA (Hons)

University of Glasgow, 2020



To the Joyous One

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Introduction

“Eschatological beliefs are universally the last of all beliefs to be influenced by the loftier conceptions of God.”¹

In 2004, in Coronado, Texas, Laura and Michael McIntyre withdrew their nine children from school in order to home-school them. The move was inspired by their strong belief that Jesus’ second coming in the form of ‘rapture’ was immanent; for the parents, there was no point in educating their children in a conventional way. It was reported that the children’s education consisted of singing and music rather than the usual academic subjects. The case went to the Texas Supreme Court as the parents sued when a district officer was sent to investigate. Laura and Michael McIntyre’s case was not upheld by the Supreme Court.²

Our vision of future affects us. Children are sent to school to learn, in order to prepare them for the future their parents/carers imagine them to have. Education has a *telos*.

What we believe about the future, matters. Feminist theologians are cognizant of the link between believed-in future and the manner in which everyday life is organised. Their aim has been to deconstruct elements deemed out of balance or even dangerous in traditional Christian eschatology. Among feminist theologians, there has been almost a wholesale abandoning of eschatology as it has been regarded as the “final frontier of non-reality, a world in which to place our anxieties and avoid the real questions.”³ Feminist theologians argue that a deferred hope robs real hope and discourages taking due responsibility for the well-being of our world and ourselves. Christian eschatology is based on a linear time concept that mines meaning from the promised (and believed-in) future. In general, in accord with post-modern thinking, feminist theology wishes to draw the attention back to the present and solely to the present, as only this will aid human flourishing, the argument goes.

¹ R. H. Charles, *The Resurrection of Man* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1929), 9, quoted in D. L. Edwards *The Last Things Now*, SCM Book Club Study Project 7 (London: SCM Press, 1969), 107.

² N. Dailey, ‘Texas Parents Refused To Give Their Kids an Education for an Insane Reason,’ *Liberal America* (online at <http://liberalamerica.life/2016/06/27/texas-parents-refused-to-give-their-kids-an-education-for-an-insane-reason/>: 2016; accessed 07.10.19).

³ M. M. Althaus-Reid and L. Isherwood, *Controversies in Feminist Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2007), 14.

However, recently some feminist writers, such as Elizabeth Stuart and Emily Pennington, have pointed out that when the traditional schema is discarded, something precious may be lost. It is into this conversation this thesis is written. This thesis seeks to salvage what is usable and inspiring in Christian eschatology without relinquishing core feminist values of relationality, ordinary embodied human flourishing and the dignity of all creation. It also seeks to reflect on my own personal disquiet concerning a future emptied of glorious prophetic visions and the hope of resurrection from the dead. As such, this thesis is about the place of teleology in feminist theologies. However, teleology is strongly bound to the concept of time. The future cannot be talked about without the category of 'time.' The question this thesis is built upon therefore pertains to the nature of time. How do feminist theologians understand time, if not linearly and teleologically? What could be a workable concept of time from a feminist theological perspective?

In order to explore these questions, in chapter one I look at theological time concepts through the lens of comparative religion and history of Christian theology. The aim of this chapter is to give a brief overview of prevalent and enduring (theological) time concepts that can form a background to the discussion on a feminist concept of time. The chapter traces the suggested development from the cyclical concept of time to the linear time concept that became the hallmark of traditional Christian eschatology. In the second chapter, I offer a review of feminist critiques of traditional Christian eschatology from the second wave of feminism. Some of it, closely linked to Liberation Theology, echoes themes raised in Chapter One. The other trajectory in feminist theology from the 'second wave' mirrors Process Thought which is discussed in the second chapter. In the final chapter, I explore recent post-structuralist and post-modern influences on feminist theology which seek to pry open new ways of thinking, away from all pervading binaries and linear causalities. This is followed by an examination of the theological issues raised in the reviews. The final move in the third chapter is to offer a new metaphor for understanding time/future that seeks to negotiate between traditional eschatology and radical feminist critique.

Strictly speaking, even though the aim of the thesis is to open up space for new concepts of time, I am aware I do not escape the well-trodden paths but, in the end, return back to where I started. Instead of avoiding such circulatory movement, I wish to use it itself as an illustration that when we try to avoid linearity, we, nevertheless, seem to end up in circles.

Chapter One: Theology of Time

Introduction

In this opening chapter, I introduce various theologically formed concepts of time from the Ancient Near East and beyond, many of which have endured till today. From the beginning of the twentieth century to the middle of the twentieth century, the Judeo-Christian teleological time concept was hailed as unique against the backdrop of Hellenistic cosmologies and other religious worldviews.⁴ A simplistic division was made between cyclical and linear time concepts as the models to be contrasted against each other. The linear time concept was claimed as the biblical revelation of the real nature of time which is teleologically orientated whereas the cyclical time concept was regarded empty of *telos*. However, a thorough investigation of various time concepts does not sustain such a simplistic division.

To show this, I start the chapter by looking at a summary from the middle of twentieth century, by Samuel G. F. Brandon, which seeks to argue for the uniqueness of a Judeo-Christian time concept. Linearity is established by introducing a beginning and an end point. However, a closer inspection of Brandon's comparisons of time concepts show that most other time concepts also have a beginning and an end point, or at least a direction towards a hoped-for/imagined goal (*telos*); and so, Brandon fails to convince. Secondly, in this chapter, I briefly survey Ancient Israelite eschatology and what is regarded as a development that occurred in this area of theology, in particular after the Exile. I then sketch the main contours of Jewish discussion on time and eternity all the way to the twentieth century before delving back into the past to trace the early Christian thought on time and eschatology.

The chapter culminates in bringing to focus the earthquake of eschatology that occurred in the twentieth century within Christian theology. I seek to demonstrate how this occurred hand-in-hand with and through inspiration from contemporary Jewish theologians. As it is

⁴ "In the middle of the 20th century there was a common perception that biblical time is fundamentally different in nature from time as it was understood in classical antiquity. The contrast was often drawn between biblical teleological time – time that is orientated toward the end or completion, and Greek cyclical time. Most scholars have moved away from this simple typology to appreciate that in both civilizations there were a variety of conceptions of time." M. Brettler, 'Cyclical and Teleological Time in the Hebrew Bible,' in R. M. Rosen (ed.), *Time and Temporality in the Ancient World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2004), 111-128; at 111.

from these roots Liberation Theology, and hence, Feminist theology, feed, I deem it relevant to this thesis to allow space to detail this connection. A further point that will become clear during the course of this thesis is that even though feminist theology has strongly criticised *telos*-heavy Christian eschatology as inimical to human flourishing, feminist theology itself does not escape teleological thinking, and hence, a teleologically orientated time concept.

1.1 A Brief History of Theological Time Concepts⁵

In *History, Time and Deity*, published in 1965, Samuel G. F. Brandon, at that time Professor of Comparative Religion at Manchester University, distinguishes five different time concepts in historic and contemporary religions around the world. He names them as ‘Ritual Perpetuation of the Past’ (Ancient Egypt), ‘Time as Deity’ (Ancient Persia), time as the ‘Sorrowful Weary Wheel’ (India/Hinduism), ‘Time as an illusion’ (Buddhism), and the Indo-Aryan/Jewish/Christian concept of time, ‘History as the Revelation of Divine Purpose.’ Through Brandon’s presentation it becomes clear that almost all the time concepts he presents have a *telos*, although this was not the intended conclusion of his work. To show this, I will give a brief summary of the time concepts Brandon offers for consideration.

1.1.1 Past Recalled

In ‘Ritual Perpetuation of the Past,’ a magic formula is used to call back a past event in order to bring the effects of that event into the present. This, according to Brandon, was used in the resurrection hopes in the Ancient Egypt, based on the myth of the resurrected Osiris.⁶ Another example of the use of this time concept, the ability or necessity to reach to the past for renewal of life in the present, Brandon mentions the New Year Rituals in later Hellenistic Egypt where it was believed that the whole cosmos was renewed and re-created yearly through the ritual. Some historians have interpreted this as a proper cyclic time concept in which the cosmos needs to be cyclically renewed in order to continue to support life. Mircea Eliade argued in *Le Mythe de L’Eternel Retour* (1949) that believers sought to bring annual

⁵ Here I am making a conscious allusion to Stephen Hawking’s *A Brief History of Time* which discusses the Special and General Theories of Relativity and the understanding of time in contemporary science.

⁶ S. G. F. Brandon, *History, Time and Deity: A Historical and Comparative Study of the Conception of Time in Religious Thought and Practice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1965), 23.

renewal to the cosmos through the ritual, setting the clock back to the beginning. Brandon summarises Eliade's thesis: "The rites concerned were designed to renew or repeat the original act of creation, and they had the virtue of wiping out the past, with all its misdeeds and misfortunes, and inaugurating a fresh beginning, a new era, in the life of the community and its members."⁷ However, Brandon disagrees with Eliade's interpretation of the cult; he points out that the archaeological records of the period show a different understanding of time: "Such record of the past clearly attest a belief in the unique and definite nature of the events thus commemorated, as well as the conviction that the memory of them was worth preserving."⁸ In other words, if Eliade's thesis was correct, one would expect a disregard of unique past events which is not the case. What however is interesting in 'Ritual Perpetuation' is the idea that the past can be recalled and brought to bear on the present. In this model, it appears that the past was not viewed as something fully extinct.

1.1.2 Divine Time

Brandon traces the idea of 'Time as Deity' to Ancient Persia and its creation myth. According to the myth, the very first thing that existed was 'the Infinite Time' (Zurvan), through which the two gods of the world, Ahura Mazda ('good' god, the creator god in Zoroastrianism) and the evil god, Angra Mainyu, (also known as Ahriman, the principle of evil) found their origin.⁹ The conception of the evil god was deemed a mistake which caused all the sorrow and suffering in the world and necessitated the fight between good and evil.¹⁰ Ahriman came to be known also as 'limited time' given to the cosmos during which the good god was said to overcome the evil god. In the end, the whole of cosmos will be reconciled back to the 'Infinite Time' of bliss, where it should have been without the evil influence.¹¹

It is in this myth that Brandon locates the origins for the dualistic thinking that later became so prevalent in Greek philosophy. However, Brandon notes that 'the dualistic

⁷ Ibid., 66.

⁸ Ibid., 68.

⁹ Ibid., 41.

¹⁰ Ibid., 42.

¹¹ Note is made by Brandon and others that Zurvan portrays not a god *per se* but a principle such as Logos, time being the one thing that existed before anything else and as a principle, it has always existed; see more for example in K. Gololobova. 'Zurvan: The Concept of Time in Zoroastrianism and its Impact on Religion and Philosophy,' *Cxið* 147/1 (2017), 89-92.

Weltanschauungen...have never been consistently dualistic.’¹² This is due to the considerations that a) the ancient Iranian creation myth points to a single origin for both good and evil, the mythologized ‘Time’; and that the point of ‘history’ is to eventually return to the infinite time (and hence, the destruction of the dualism created by Evil) and b) time was seen in its original form to be infinite, with no beginning and no end, and hence any linear conception of time is only a poor copy of time as it really is. This is particularly important to note here because scholars have often claimed that the linear time concept originates from the Ancient Persia. It is also important to note here that by ‘Infinite Time’ it is not timelessness that is meant but indeed time that has neither an end nor a beginning.¹³

The worship of time as a deity is still practiced in Hinduism: Kali, a paradoxical female deity of death and destruction, derives her name from Kala which is the word for ‘time’ in ancient Sanskrit.¹⁴ Kali has received notable attention from feminists as she also represents time’s other side, the bringing to birth, as well as its destructive force, causing death and decay of the same creatures.¹⁵ It is this paradoxical nature of time Brandon highlights in the ancient imagination: both life and destruction of life are seen as the sphere of time which itself has no origin.¹⁶

1.1.3 Time as a Wheel

In Hinduism, a certain cyclic notion of time is apparent but not without *telos*. The goal is the progress of souls through many rebirths into ‘higher levels’ and finally, to escape the ‘Sorrowful Weary Wheel’ of time into Brahman, the World Soul, through enlightenment. “If existence in Time involves suffering, then deliverance from suffering will mean deliverance from Time,” Brandon writes, and this then negates the perceived cyclic notion of time: ultimate existence is timeless and history here too is teleological: to escape ‘history’/‘time’ into a timeless existence.¹⁷

¹² Brandon, *History, Time and Deity*, 63.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁵ See for example V. Dalmiya’s chapter ‘Loving Paradoxes: a feminist reclamation of the Goddess Kali,’ in *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion*, Critical Readings Series, P. S. Anderson and B. Clack (eds.) (London: Routledge, 2004), 241-263, for a discussion of Kali’s role in feminist thought. Generally speaking, Kali has been perceived as a useful feminist (monistic) symbol for disrupting (patriarchal) dualities, e.g. at 242.

¹⁶ Brandon, *History, Time and Deity*, 41.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 102.

1.1.4 Time as an Illusion

In Buddhism, which sprang from Hinduism, similar ideas are present regarding the place of suffering in temporal existence; the final goal is to escape the suffering via the upward transmigration of souls. However, Buddhism ultimately denies the reality of time, calling it an illusion that has tied the human experience into suffering and is the very cause of suffering.¹⁸ Through meditation Buddhist believers hope to achieve the understanding of the true reality of existence which operates on timeless plane. ‘Salvation’ in Buddhism is located in breaking the power of the illusion and reaching into the real existence of all things in the ‘present.’¹⁹ This then becomes the *telos* even when time is denied as a concept.

1.1.5 Time in Ancient Greece

In surveying Greek notions of time, Brandon notes how Greek time concepts seem closely linked to those that have been introduced so far.²⁰ Who influenced whom remains an open question; for example, there is an unresolved debate regarding the concept of timeless eternity, whether it was first formulated by Parmenides, Plato or someone else altogether.²¹ As previously noted, the Ancient Persian idea of time was that of infinite time, not of timelessness. Plato describes a timeless eternity of God who at some point creates time and matter. In the temporal and material plane, all things are mere copies of what exists in the world of ideas, in timeless eternity. However, cosmologically speaking, although introducing a beginning to time, Plato does not seem to describe an absolute end to the world as it is. In Plato and Orphism the belief in transmigration of souls much akin to Hinduism can be found, but just like in Hinduism, the world knows no end (only individual souls do).²²

¹⁸ Ibid., 103-4.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 88.

²¹ References to this debate can be found from the article of J. G. Wilberding, ‘Eternity in Ancient Philosophy’ in *Eternity: A History*, Y. Y. Melamed (ed.), Oxford Scholarship Online (online at <https://www-oxfordscholarship-com.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199781874.001.0001/acprof-9780199781874> : 2016, accessed 22.02.20), 15-55, at 16. A short version of the debate can be found in L. Tarán, ‘Perpetual duration and atemporal eternity in Parmenides and Plato,’ *The Monist* 62/1 (1979), 43-53.

²² According to Herodotus (rightly or wrongly), this belief was brought to Greece from Egypt, Brandon, *History, Time and Deity*, 89.

However, other views of time were developed in Hellas too: Aristotle disagreed with Plato on the possibility of timeless existence.²³ Aristotle linked time closely with change, with the descriptions of ‘before’ and ‘after’ and so, he argued that if creation happened, there must have been ‘before’ creation and ‘after’ the act of creating which means, there must have been time in what Plato regards as the eternal sphere. For Aristotle, where there is any change, there must be time and time must be endless, without beginning and without an end (because otherwise, one would have the category ‘before time starts’ which again talks of time existing prior). However, Aristotle offers what seems contradictory statements about time which explains why different scholars have different views on Aristotle’s time concept. In Aristotle there is the idea that time is a measuring unit and hence dependent on the human mind in order to ‘exist.’ Due to this it can be said that Aristotle thought of time as an illusion. Also, Aristotle defined time as not being the same as change but being dependant on change; this is taken up by the current philosophical debates on time which consider the relationship of time and change.²⁴

As referred to at the beginning of this chapter, for a while it was assumed that Greek notions of time were cyclical and without a *telos*. However, on closer inspection of the various time concepts that existed among the Ancient Greeks, only one truly cyclical notion of time can be discerned, namely that of the Stoics. In Stoic cosmology, the whole cosmos is burned up and then restarted again, endlessly. Brandon quotes Nemesius, the fourth-century bishop of Emesa:

The Stoics say that when the planets return, at certain fixed periods of time, to the same relative positions, in length and breadth, which they had at the beginning, when the kosmos was first constituted, this produces the conflagration and destruction of everything which exists. Then again the kosmos is restored anew in a precisely similar arrangement as before. The stars again move in their orbits, each performing its revolution in the former period, without variation. Socrates and Plato and each individual man will live again, with the same friends and fellow citizens. They will go

²³ The view here expressed is based on the interpretation of church fathers and medieval philosophers on the difference between Aristotelian and Platonian time. For a discussion on whether this ‘classic’ differentiation is correct or not, see for example W. von Leyden, ‘Time, Number, and Eternity in Plato and Aristotle,’ *The Philosophical Quarterly* 14 (1950) and 54 (1964), 35-52.

²⁴ For a sophisticated and complex study on Aristotelian thought on time see U. Coope, *Time For Aristotle, Physics IV., 10-14*, Oxford Aristotle Studies, Oxford Scholarship Online (online at <https://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/0199247900.001.0001/acprof-9780199247905> : 2006; accessed 20.11.19).

through the same experiences and the same activities. Every city and village and field will be restored, just as it was. And this restoration of the universe takes place, not once, but over and over again – indeed to all eternity without end.²⁵

Brandon concludes that such fully cyclical concept of time surely robs humans of all meaning since it lacked *telos*; however, it formed the basis for Stoic attitude in life which encouraged practitioners of this philosophy to endure life's many challenges with fortitude and composure.²⁶

1.2 Time in Jewish Eschatology

Turning to the Hebrew concept of time, Brandon praises the way past events are regarded in the Hebrew Scriptures as unique: past events become a means of (theological) revelation.. He writes:

Among the sacred literatures of mankind that of the Hebrews is distinguished by its concern with what purports to be historical fact. Not only does a large part of the constituent documents take the form of historical narrative, but in almost every other writing of the corpus reference is constant to certain notable events of the nation's past.²⁷

Brandon links this theological focus on historical events with the emergence of progress in reference to history:

This Yahwist tradition is indeed a remarkable composition, and, so far as the extant evidence goes, it seems to have set the pattern of the Hebrew view of history as the progressive manifestation of the purpose of Yahweh.²⁸

However, here too the story is not as simple as it sounds. Earlier in his book, in his introduction to Greek cyclic notions of time, Brandon had quoted from Ecclesiastes 1:9-10:

²⁵ Brandon, *History, Time and Deity*, 93, quoting from J. von Arnim, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, II, frag. 625, transl. by E. Bevan in *Later Greek Religion* (London: 1927), 30-31.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 94. I personally like to think of the British 'Keep Calm' posters as vestiges of Stoic attitude to life.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 106.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 108.

“That which hath been is that which shall be; and that which hath been done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.”²⁹ Brandon argues that this was not

characteristic of Hebrew thought on the subject; it does in fact most probably derive from Greek tradition, and is representative of the Hellenistic influence that so profoundly affected Jewish culture of the Diaspora during the last two centuries B.C. and the first century of the present era.³⁰

1.2.1 Spiralling Time

Brandon’s conclusion is not shared by all. More recently, Jewish scholars have concluded that both linear and cyclical time were operating in Hebrew thought simultaneously.³¹ When discussing the time concept in Yezidism, which shares the amalgamation of linear and cyclic time concept with Judaism, Omarkhali and Rezanian suggest that the cyclic notion of time is the original, archaic (agricultural) one to which linear concept was added through developing eschatological thinking.³² Taken together, these two notions of time yield the notion of spiral that could be claimed as the underlying Jewish concept of time and which might not have an end point at all.

1.2.2 The Rising of the Dead

In *Primitive Christian Eschatology*, E. C. Dewick ascribes various stages to Hebrew eschatology. Instead of Greek influence, Dewick identifies Babylonian influence as the main influence on Hebrew thought. According to Dewick, in the Babylonian religion there was no trace of cosmic eschatology, and similarly, it is also “entirely absent from Hebrew thought from the time of the Exodus till the seventh and eighth century B.C.; and that even the hope

²⁹ Ibid., 85.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ W. Z. Harvey, ‘Reviewed Works: La Clepsydre: Essai sur la pluralité des temps dans le judaïsme by Sylvie Anne Goldberg; Time Matters: Time, Creation, and Cosmology in Medieval Jewish Philosophy by Tamar M. Rudavsky,’ *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, XCII, 3-4 (2002), 598-601.

³² K. Omarkhali, K. Rezanian, ‘Some reflections on concepts of time in Yezidism,’ in *From Daēnā to Dîn: Religion, Kultur und Sprache in der iranischen Welt*, C. Allison, A. Joisten-Pruschke and A. Wendtland (eds.), (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009), 333-348; at 346.

of *personal* immortality played no important part in Israel's religious aspirations."³³ In his account of how resurrection belief came to dominate the eschatological arena in Jewish thought David L. Edwards notes that some vestiges of this-world-only orientation is still found in the first century A.D. among the Jewish sect of Sadducees who denied personal immortality due to their insistence on restricting their Holy Scriptures to the five books of Moses (which do not make any reference to life after death).³⁴ Outwith the Torah proper, however, a term 'Sheol' is used as a resting place for the dead. This was borrowed from the Babylonians, Dewick writes.³⁵ Sheol was a place of shadowy existence without an end: "the early Hebrews believed that the individual did indeed survive death, and went to join his ancestors; but he lived on only in the shadowy pit of Sheol, where the life was not true life."³⁶

According to Dewick, it was the Hebrew prophets who started to proclaim a prescribed eschatological future for the nation of Israel and thus extended the theological horizon beyond the limited scope of human life and "joyless immortality."³⁷ Their main concern was not predicting the future, but rather, "to interpret the character and will of God to His people."³⁸ This, Dewick suggests, resulted in two-fold teaching, one aspect concerning "the doctrine of retribution on a moral basis" and another, kindling the faith "in the ultimate fulfilment of the Covenant-Promises to Israel."³⁹ Previously, retribution for wrong doing was not seen as an individual matter only but affecting family, especially descendants, the tribe and the nation as a community (e.g. see Achan's sin, Joshua seven). Additionally, retribution was seen as something that occurs in this life only; if any guilt was left unpunished in this life, it was then transferred to the descendants of that person up until the third generation.⁴⁰ Dewick argues that prophets such as Ezekiel and Jeremiah express dissatisfaction with this form of retribution, representing an "early 'individualism' " that might have been a source for later belief in personal immortality.⁴¹

On the doctrine of resurrection, Dewick writes: "The beginnings of this great eschatological doctrine may be found in the pre-exilic prophets; but it played no important part in the

³³ E.C. Dewick, *Primitive Christian Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), 13, 15 (emphasis original).

³⁴ D. L. Edwards, *The Last Things Now*, SCM Book Club Study Project 7 (London: SCM Press, 1969), 38.

³⁵ Dewick, *Primitive Christian Eschatology*, 15.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ "There can be little doubt that Jeremiah and Ezekiel believed that every man did, in fact receive his due reward within the span of his life." *Ibid.*, 20, 21.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

religious ideas of the Jews until after the Exile.”⁴² It may well be that the need for a hope of a national resurrection occurred hand in hand with the hope of resurrection of the individuals:

It satisfies [the] highest hopes of a national future, because it enables the whole nation, past, present, and future, to share in the coming Kingdom of God; it satisfies [the] belief in the law of retribution, because it offers another opportunity when the injustice of this world may be perfectly remedied. But it is important to notice how strictly the resurrection is limited to the *faithful* dead; it is a privilege for God’s people, and explicitly contrasted with the fate of the world at large.⁴³

In more recent times, reliance exclusively on Babylonian sources as an explanation for the development of Jewish eschatology has been widely dismissed.⁴⁴ It has been pointed out that the Greeks also held to a belief in a shadowy after-life similar to Sheol and to the possibility of bodily resurrection for certain deserving people.⁴⁵ In the Hellenistic period, in Jewish Wisdom Literature, it was the martyrs of Jewish faith who were said to qualify for bodily resurrection.⁴⁶ How the belief in resurrection for some was later transformed into a belief in general resurrection of all people, is sometimes explained through the arrival of apocalypse as a new genre of writing.

1.2.3 Jewish Apocalyptic Writings

Scholars have identified seventeen books that fit within the genre of apocalypse in Jewish tradition.⁴⁷ Many of these share remarkably similar themes and story lines to Iranian mythology, in particular to those found in Zoroastrianism. When the Persian writings were first translated into English in the nineteenth century, they were regarded as the source for apocalypse as a genre that was later imported into Jewish eschatology.⁴⁸ As previously noted, in Iranian cosmology the world and time are seen as the battlefield on which the conflict

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 23-24. Reference here is made to Ezekiel 37, the valley of dry bones; emphasis original.

⁴⁴ B. T. Arnold, ‘Old Testament Eschatology and the Rise of Apocalypticism’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, J. L. Walls (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 23-29; at 30.

⁴⁵ J. J. Collins, ‘Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Ancient World,’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, J. L. Walls (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 40-51; at 43.

⁴⁶ See also 2 Maccabees 7:14 “When he neared his end he cried, ‘Ours is the better choice, to meet death at men’s hands, yet relying on God’s promise that we shall be raised up by him; whereas for you there can be no resurrection to new life.’ “ (The New Jerusalem Bible)

⁴⁷ Arnold, ‘Old Testament Eschatology,’ 33.

⁴⁸ Collins, ‘Apocalyptic Eschatology,’ 41.

between good and evil plays out, to which a certain end is ordained. Jewish apocalyptic writings follow a similar trajectory, however, when it comes to the purpose of the genre and its intended message within Judaism and later, in Christianity, much remains open-ended; a fully-fledged cosmology might have not been the original purpose for these writings.⁴⁹ The difficulty in dating Zoroastrian literature has thrown doubt on its assumed primacy to Jewish apocalypses.⁵⁰ From this follows that the linear time concept might not in fact be originating from Persia but could legitimately be regarded as part of (distinct) Hebrew theological heritage.⁵¹

Although there are several proto-apocalyptic writings among Jewish scriptures (e.g. Second Isaiah and parts of Zechariah), the only book in the Jewish canon that is regarded as an ‘apocalypse proper’ is the book of Daniel.⁵² At the end of the book of Daniel, a reference is made to Daniel’s being woken up after death to take part in the events at the end of the world and with him ‘many’ others. Referring to this prophecy, D. L. Edwards comments: “Many rabbis have taken the words about the ‘many’ awakening...[to] refer to the resurrection of mankind as a whole.”⁵³ In rabbinic Judaism after the fall of Jerusalem, the doctrine of general resurrection gained the upper-hand over other models; in the Middle Ages, it was incorporated by Maimonides into the thirteen articles of faith. However, Maimonides himself “taught that the resurrection bodies would also perish after a time, and only the souls of the righteous would be immortal.”⁵⁴ The extent to which Maimonides was influenced by Platonism or Neo-platonism in his beliefs, is still subject to debate.⁵⁵ In line with Plato, Maimonides understood God to exist in eternity and to be the creator of time, a position which is regarded as fairly standard in Conservative Judaism today.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ Ibid., 43-47.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 42.

⁵¹ Ibid., 43; also Arnold, ‘Old Testament Eschatology,’ 33 quotes E. Jenni: “The eschatological view of the Old Testament finds no real parallels in nonbiblical religions, even if it has absorbed and elaborated on all kinds of foreign motifs.” E. Jenni, ‘Eschatology,’ in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible 2*, K. D. Sakenfeld (ed.) (Abingdon Press, 2009), 126–33; at 127.

⁵² Arnold, ‘Old Testament Eschatology,’ 33; as a working definition for apocalypse, Arnold offers J. J. Collins’s formulation: “A genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world,” *ibid.*, 32, from J. J. Collins, ‘Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre’ in *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, Semeia 14, J. J. Collins (ed.) (Missoula, Mont.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1979), 1–20; at 9.

⁵³ Edwards, *The Last Things*, 28.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ D. Novak, ‘Jewish Eschatology’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, J. L. Walls (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 114-128; at 123.

⁵⁶ D. Hellenson, ‘Eternity and Time’ in *Dictionary of Ancient Rabbis: Selections from the Jewish Encyclopaedia*, J. Neusner (ed.) (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 189-192; at 190.

The eschatological concept of the Cosmic Week which later was taken up by Christian theologians is often traced back to Jewish apocalyptic writings, with the potential link to the Ancient Iranian theological heritage.⁵⁷ The idea behind the Cosmic Week is that the world was created to last six thousand years after which follows a Sabbath rest of the world lasting one thousand years, this being the Messianic Age.⁵⁸ There are variations to the interpretation of the ‘seventh day’ and how the resurrection of all fitted this eschatological schema. Philo for example talks of the Sabbath rest as something that God is enjoying at all times and so he subscribes no linear ending to history.⁵⁹ In this, Philo is consistent with the interpretation of Moses, according to whom, as it was understood at the time, time had a beginning but not an end.⁶⁰

1.2.4 Time and Eternity in Twentieth Century Judaism

In more recent debates, Jewish eschatology is often described in more immanent terms than Christian eschatology. Gershom Scholem characterises the Jewish idea of redemption as always occurring in the visible world, whereas in Christianity, redemption is

an event in the spiritual and unseen realm, an event which is reflected in the soul, in the private world of each individual, and which effects an inner transformation which need not correspond to anything outside.⁶¹

Christian theologians have also emphasised the grounding of Jewish theology in time and space, its futurity being imagined within the continuity of this world rather than in terms of disruption/abolishing of history.⁶²

Whilst it might well be that there is a difference between the Jewish and Christian idea of salvation, when it comes to the understanding of time and time’s relationship to God and vice-versa, Jewish theologians have shared many similar views with Christian theologians. The general belief in an eternal God who created time and space is common to Augustine and

⁵⁷ R. M. Johnston, ‘The Eschatological Sabbath in John’s Apocalypse: A Reconsideration,’ *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 25/1 (1987), 39-50; at 41.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁵⁹ D. Lanzinger, ‘”A Sabbath Rest for the People of God” (Heb 4.9): Hebrews and Philo on the Seventh Day of Creation,’ *New Testament Studies* 64, no. 1 (2018), 94-107; at 101-102.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ G. Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays in Jewish Spirituality*, transl. by M. A. Meyer (New York: Schocken 1971), 1.

⁶² See for example Arnold, ‘Old Testament Eschatology,’ 23, 29.

much of medieval Christendom and beyond. In the twentieth century, perhaps taking their cue from Philo, several influential rabbis suggested that through the practice of religion, the believer partakes in God's eternity in the here and now.⁶³ A notable early twentieth century Jewish theologian to speak for the 'eternal present' was Franz Rosenzweig for whom revelation makes participation in God's eternity possible. "Judaism is thus removed from the flux of history through its response to an atemporal revelation, and the Jewish people, to Rosenzweig as for the ancient rabbis, alone experience the 'taste of eternity in time,'" Hellenson writes.⁶⁴ However, the traumatic experiences of the Jews under the Third Reich, during the Shoah and beyond, called for a revision of this schema. Relying on Martin Heidegger's emphasis on the reliance of *Dasein* on the temporal, Emil Fackheimer criticized Rosenzweig's denial of time's relevance and suggested that it is in history that the Eternal manifests itself, although not necessarily in an ongoing, permanent fashion.⁶⁵

Religious Zionism picks up the idea of history towards a promised golden age from the Cosmic Week schema. Prophecies are taken literally as predictions and revelations of God's unfolding plan which culminates in the world peace, ushered in by the appearance of the Messiah and the destruction of those opposing the Jewish rule. The founding of the State of Israel is believed to be both a strong evidence and a chief example of God's culminating time plan.⁶⁶ All of this is to happen within the parameters of this space and this time and not in a world beyond this (i.e. in eternity): these expected events do not spell the end of the world *per se*.⁶⁷ Commentators on the Hebrew prophecies have noted that the Hebrew word for 'last days' or 'end of days' does not necessarily indicate an end of the world but possibly, an end of an era which gives birth to a new era. The term could also be understood as a vague expression of future as 'in the days to come.'⁶⁸ Oscar Cullmann, in *Time and Christ*, argues that the Hebrew word 'olam' corresponds to the Greek 'aion' which due to Platonic interference has been incorrectly understood as a timeless eternity, whereas it correctly should be understood to describe this world and 'periods' within this world.⁶⁹ Of 'olam'

⁶³ Hellenson, 'Eternity and Time,' 190-192. Hellenson mentions rabbis Abraham Isaac Kook and Abraham Joshua Heschel as proponents of this view.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁶⁶ As summarised e.g. in R. G. Schultz, 'Religious & Zionist,' My Jewish Learning (available online at <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/religious-zionist/>; accessed 12.03.2020).

⁶⁷ For a quick summary of traditional Jewish eschatology, see for example H. J. Matt, 'An Outline of Jewish Eschatology,' *Judaism* 17/2 (1968), 186-196. Regarding this-world orientation, see p. 193.

⁶⁸ Brettler, 'Cyclical and Teleological Time Concepts,' 121.

⁶⁹ O. Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History* (SCM Press, 1951), 45-47.

Cullman writes that it is a synonym of ‘kosmos’, the universe, and not a temporal/atemporal reference.⁷⁰ As to ‘aion’, Cullman notes it can either mean ‘an exactly defined period of time’ as well as ‘an undefined and incalculable duration’ which came to be translated as ‘eternity’ but really is about limitless time period, not about ‘timelessness.’⁷¹

Finally, Jewish mysticism, in particular Kabbalah which has seeped into the main stream contemporary Judaism in deeply pervasive ways, has its own version(s) of eschatology.⁷² In Lurianic Kabbalah, the Divine sparks are said to have dispersed in the world and will need to be gathered together through the prayers and meditations of the faithful: It is the faithful that are given the responsibility to repair the world (*tikkun olam*).⁷³ In other versions of the Kabbalah, *She'kinah*, the lost presence of God and at the same time, one of the ten *sefirot*, is to be helped back from exile to the central place which it was believed once to have occupied and beyond that, ‘at the end of the days,’ it is to permeate the whole of creation with its transcendental quality.⁷⁴ Although different to the immanent understanding of world history in religious Zionism, the mystical versions of Jewish Eschatology also point towards a better time that will eventually be experienced by the whole world.

1.3 Time and Eternity in Christianity

Just as with the Hebrew concepts of time, it is not helpful to make an overarching definition of the concept of time in Christianity due to the many influences and debates about time that have shaped Christian theology over two millennia. However, the *locus classicus* is understood to hold that God is a timeless being who created time together with matter/the universe; time and matter belong together, were created together and ultimately, will come to an end together. The final existence and the destiny of humanity is to live in a spiritual new world that supersedes the material world in a timeless existence called eternity.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Ibid, 45.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² J. Telushkin, ‘Kabbalah, an Overview’ (online at <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/kabbalah-an-overview> ; accessed 20.11.19).

⁷³ L. Fine, ‘Tikkun in Lurianic Kabbalah’ (online at <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/tikkun-in-lurianic-kabbalah/> ; accessed 20.11.19).

⁷⁴ Telushkin, ‘Kabbalah,’ also J. Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (London: SCM Press, 1996), 266.

⁷⁵ See for example N. Deng, ‘Eternity in Christian Thought,’ *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (online at <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/eternity/> : 2018; accessed 22.02.20).

1.3.1 Time in the Church Fathers

Writing about the eschatology of the Church Fathers, Brian Daley comments that “early Christian eschatology remains an under-researched area in the history of theology and religious practice.”⁷⁶ Although much research has been undertaken “on early millenarian hope and on the controversial aspects of Origenist eschatology—especially centered on Origen's conception of the resurrection body,” and on the idea of salvation as becoming ‘divine,’ stemming from the eastern patristic traditions, further work is still needed to understand “what is distinctive in Christian hope.”⁷⁷ It would be presumptuous (and beyond the scope of this dissertation) to attempt to summarise adequately the various views on eschatology held by the Church Fathers. Below, I will briefly mention only a few main points that form the background to the themes of this thesis.

Augustine of Hippo is regarded as the main influence on the *locus classicus*, who, as W. A. Hernandez argues, in his works *On Genesis* and *The Confessions* attests that God exists outwith time and is the creator of time.⁷⁸ However, elsewhere in *The Confessions* Augustine develops another theory of time that seems to suggest that time is a feature of the human consciousness, as it is only there that the past, present and future, the three features of time, properly exist.⁷⁹ Augustine’s understanding of time is presentist: only the present exists; however, it could be argued that according to his second theory, time as a psychological feature of a human mind, time is nothing but an illusion.

Augustine makes reference to the Cosmic Week but firmly insists that the Seventh Day of rest is a spiritual state attained by the believer through Christ Jesus.⁸⁰ The real destiny of humanity lay in the Eighth Day that was to occur in eternity, beyond time and space.⁸¹ Marjorie Reeves summarises this position and its influence on medieval Christendom thus:

[T]he alluring ideas of millennium and Sabbath Age were placed outside the range of visionary speculation on a climax to history. For the medieval disciples of St.

⁷⁶ B. Daley, ‘Eschatology in the Early Church Fathers’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, J. L. Walls (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 94-105; at 104.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁷⁸ W. A. Hernandez, ‘Augustine on Time,’ *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 6/6 (2016), 37-40; at 37.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 39-40; here (and elsewhere) Augustine seems to follow similar logic to Aristotle.

⁸⁰ M. Reeves, ‘The Originality and Influence of Joachim of Fiore,’ *Traditio* 36 (1980), 269-316; at 273.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Augustine that climax was already past. The space between the First and Second Advents was one of waiting, a period in which nothing significant happens except the garnering of souls.⁸²

It was perhaps the gnostic influence on early Christianity that pushed Augustine towards an a-historic interpretation of the originally Jewish idea of the Messianic golden age. Daley summarises gnostic theology as

the conviction that the present, embodied condition of human consciousness is not a natural or ideal state, but is itself the sign of a fallen world, in which fragments of a primal, wholly intellectual universe have become involved in matter, through the incompetence or malevolence of a descending chain of intermediate creators.⁸³

Gnostic salvation comprises the realisation of the true nature of existence.⁸⁴ Some gnostics were able to ‘salvage’ the Christian idea of resurrection by interpreting resurrection as the (gnostic) enlightenment of the soul in the present.⁸⁵ Clement of Alexandria, for example, somewhat in line with gnostic thought, saw Christian life as the spiritual awakening and maturing towards full knowledge of Christ.⁸⁶ Trials in this life and punishment after death all serve towards freeing the person from enslavement to flesh, the goal being perfection that will be finally achieved by all.

Origen who also came from Alexandria, tended to a strongly spiritualised understanding of Christian salvation and resurrection. Relying on late Platonic thought, Origen viewed God as the perfect being, which implied that God is fully incorporeal; incorporeality then becomes the ultimate goal for all creaturely existence.⁸⁷

The final, blessed state of the rational creature, in Origen's view, will be an existence in which this embodiment no longer reflects, in its corruptibility and coarseness, the alienation from God that is due to the Fall, but will support the soul's “increasingly perfect understanding” of the spiritual reality of God.⁸⁸

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Daley, ‘Eschatology,’ 94.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Daley quotes N. Hammadi, ‘Treatise on the Resurrection,’ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Other Church Fathers, such as Gregory of Nyssa, writing against a full spiritualisation of eschatology, wished to affirm materiality of the resurrection body to some extent, but for example insisted that the risen body would not include sexual organs or other functions that reflect material decay.⁸⁹ However, in general, it was the soul's journey from enslavement to freedom that became the main theological focus in Christian eschatology; the final goal was human perfection which was understood to be in the image of an incorporeal, changeless, atemporal God.

That said, in contradiction to his own theology, Augustine sowed seeds for the interpretation of cosmic eschatology as a historical progression.⁹⁰ In his 'two cities' theology in the *City of God*, the worldly city that exists alongside the heavenly city (the church) will be swallowed up and finally will perish, under the forward-marching vision of the heavenly city.⁹¹ In the Middle Ages, Joachim of Fiore is perhaps best known among those who took up the idea of historical progress, and particularly the Cosmic Week. He developed a theology of three ages, of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. According to Reeves, Joachim modified the Augustinian formula of *ante legem*, *sub lege* and *sub gratia* by relating them to the Trinity.⁹² However, Joachim kept to the idea that the final state of the world will be beyond time and space, in line with Augustine's interpretation of the Cosmic Week.⁹³

1.3.2 Metanarratives of Progress⁹⁴

The idea of historical progress seeded in John's Apocalypse, and developed by Joachim and others, became secularised, via the Reformation, some would argue, in the Enlightenment era.⁹⁵ Charles Taylor has offered an impressive account of what led to secularisation of Western Christendom in his study, *A Secular Age*. Whilst the secularisation of the Western culture is not the theme of this thesis, an account of Christian views of time would not be

⁸⁹ Ibid., 102.

⁹⁰ E.g. E. Phillips, 'Eschatology and Apocalyptic' in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Political Theology*, C. Hovey and E. Phillips (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 274-296; at 277-278.

⁹¹ P. Brians, 'St. Augustine: *The Two Cities, The City of God*, XIV, 1,' Washington State University (online at <https://brians.wsu.edu/2016/11/14/st-augustine-the-two-cities-the-city-of-god-xiv-1/>; accessed 17.02.20).

⁹² Reeves, 'The Originality and Influence,' 292.

⁹³ Ibid., 293.

⁹⁴ Taken from a subtitle of R. Bauckham's 'Conclusion: Emerging Issues in Eschatology in the Twenty-First Century' in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, J. L. Walls (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 671-182, at 673.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 674.

complete without mentioning the foundational impact Christian eschatology is deemed to have had upon the contemporary Western worldview.

There are three forms of progress thought infused with Christian eschatology that I wish to mention here, before turning to the eschatological earthquake of the twentieth century. These are, Hegel's concept of World Spirit, Victorian-era Christian optimism ('post-millennialism') and the dispensationalism stemming from the Plymouth Brethren preacher John Nelson Darby.

W. F. Hegel, a German Idealist, developed a philosophy around historic progress driven by the self-realisation of the World Spirit.⁹⁶ The culmination of this self-realisation of God, in Hegel's understanding, was Western civilisation, which at Hegel's time showed signs of taking over the world. Although Hegel was not an atheist, his vision was to become the foundation stone for secular eschatology and has influenced Marxism and Communism and other revolutions. Hegel's progressive vision of God's self-knowledge also provided inspiration to other philosophers such as A. N. Whitehead, the father of process philosophy, whose connection to feminism I will explore in greater depth in chapter two.

Despite the distaste for the idea of earthly millennium which was mainly based on Augustinian theology during the Reformation era,⁹⁷ Augustine's unintentionally planted seeds for the idea of 'historical progress' came to fruition in the Victorian era. Perhaps due to the technological advancement of the Industrial Revolution and the 'unstoppable' forward march of Christendom in the nineteenth-century world through European colonialism and mission, the millennial kingdom which is spoken about in the Book of Revelation was regarded a historic reality of the present, unfolding in time and space.⁹⁸ The Enlightenment's demand for justice and equality and education in rationality followed the same path although increasingly separating itself from its Christian roots.⁹⁹ Consequently, both the Christian

⁹⁶ V. Westhelle, 'Liberation Theology: A Latitudinal Perspective' in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, J. L. Walls (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 311-323; at 313-314.

⁹⁷ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 155; Moltmann writes: "The Reformers were also convinced that the millenium was a historical era in the past, and that with the manifestation of the pope as Antichrist this era had come to an end...The Ausburg Confession and the Confession Helvetica both declare the 'Jewish dream' of a golden age before the judgment as heretical."

⁹⁸ See for example M. Spence, 'The Renewal of Time and Space: The Missing Element of Discussions about Nineteenth-Century Premillennialism,' *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 63/1 (2012), 81-101.

⁹⁹ G. Sauter, 'Protestant Theology,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, J. L. Walls (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 248-260; at 253.

West and increasingly secularised Western culture subscribed to the idea of ever-increasing human progress for the betterment of the whole world.¹⁰⁰

The above-mentioned theological position in the Victorian era carries the label ‘post-millennialism.’ At about the same time, an Anglo-Irish preacher named John Nelson Darby advocated a different version of Christian eschatology, generally called ‘pre-millennialism,’ the belief in the worsening state of the world before the return of Christ which will usher in the one thousand year of peace and prosperity (‘millennium’).¹⁰¹ Darby gained an audience for his developing theory of ‘dispensations,’ God-ordained eras, that lead up to the second coming of Christ. This included a secret ‘rapture’ of true believers before a severe period of ‘tribulations’ (world-wide trouble) was unleashed on the world by God. Darby’s interpretation of eschatology was based on a literalist reading of the Scriptures and on the terminological separation of church and Israel (which was believed to play an important role as a nation in God’s final plan for history). This form of Christian eschatology came to be widely adopted in conservative forms of Western Protestantism after the Second World War, especially in America.¹⁰² It experienced an upsurge in the 1970s through Hal Lindsay’s *Planet Earth* series. In the 1990s the interest in dispensationalism reached further heights through the popular *Left Behind* book series, written by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, and their later film versions.¹⁰³ Although Darby’s scheme differs from the optimistic outlook of the Victorian era, it too follows the idea of historical progress towards a prescribed end and is based on a linear understanding of time.

1.3.3 The Eschatological Earthquake of the Twentieth Century

¹⁰⁰ Bauckham, ‘Conclusion,’ 674.

¹⁰¹ Christianity Today, ‘John Nelson Darby: Father of Dispensationalism’ (online at <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/pastorsandpreachers/john-nelson-darby.html> ; accessed 20.11.19), summary from J. I. Packer’s *131 Christians Everyone Should Know* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2000).

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Much has been written on dispensationalism and this version of Christian eschatology; for a recent doctoral thesis on this theme see Anbara Mariam Khalidi’s ‘It was the worst of times; it was the worst of times’ Popular Prophecy, Rapture Fiction, and the Imminent Apocalypse in Contemporary American Evangelism,’ (DPhil diss, Oxford University, 2014) (online at Oxford University Research Archive <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:e2e7da46-9462-448c-88ae-8a98a9482b8d> ; accessed 11.01.2020).

The twentieth century has been called the ‘Century of Eschatology’ because eschatological thinking was pushed to the foreground of theological discourse.¹⁰⁴ The shift in eschatological thinking in the twentieth century has often been traced back to the ‘search for historical Jesus’ by Albert Schweitzer and others.¹⁰⁵ Schweitzer noted that apocalyptic thinking was central to the preaching and life of Jesus, who, Schweitzer believed, expected the end of the world to be immanent. Jesus’ expectation was in line with early Judaism’s understanding of God’s physical reign in this world, Schweitzer argued.¹⁰⁶ In his work, Schweitzer followed the historical critical method of the nineteenth century’s liberal theology, yet, as Peter C. Phan observes,

In an ironic twist of history, the failure of nineteenth-century liberal theology’s ‘quest for the historical Jesus’ produced one of the most momentous insights for contemporary theology, namely, that apocalypticism and eschatology stood at the center of Jesus’ message and ministry and of early Christianity.¹⁰⁷

Schweitzer’s unlocking of the subject bore much fruit. In his *Eternity in Time: A Study of Karl Rahner’s Eschatology*, Phan discusses nine different models of eschatology including C. H. Dodd’s ‘realized eschatology’, the ‘already-but-not-yet’ eschatology proposed by Wolfhart Pannenberg and Juergen Moltmann, and the radical eschatology of Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Barth.¹⁰⁸ These all share the conviction that eschatology has something to say about the present and that eschatology has a wider and more comprehensive place in overall theology than had previously been thought.

In ‘realized eschatology,’ as proposed by C. H. Dodd, rather than being a future expectation, eschatology is seen as having already happened in its fullness through Jesus’ ministry, death and resurrection. The Kingdom of God is understood to be already present in the lives lived under God’s rule.¹⁰⁹ In my understanding, Dodd’s reading closely mirrors Augustine’s interpretation that the fullness of history is completed by the First Advent. This was modified to an ‘already-but-not-yet’ understanding of eschatology in the thought of Moltmann, Tillich

¹⁰⁴ Attributed to C. Schwöbel, ‘Last Things First? The Century of Eschatology in Retrospect’ in *The Future as God’s Gift: Explorations in Christian Eschatology*, D. Fergusson and M. Sarot (eds.) (Edinburgh: T&TClark, 2000), 217-241; at 217.

¹⁰⁵ P. C. Phan, ‘Roman Catholic Theology’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, J. L. Walls (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 215-229; at 221.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 15.

and others, according to which Christ's ministry, death and resurrection heralded an eschatological era in which Christians currently live, waiting for Christ's second return and the culmination of history. In this model, past and present are significant for bringing in the future, but the orientation is towards the future.¹¹⁰ In Moltmann's theology of hope, holding onto the promises of God regarding the future becomes the key in the future being realised in history, through the breaking in of eternity in the lives of the individuals by the Holy Spirit.¹¹¹ For Moltmann, time flows from the future towards the present instead of the other way round.¹¹² Consequently, God's eternity is not to be understood in opposition to temporal existence but as the fulfilment of temporality ('fulness of time').¹¹³ Moltmann attributes his understanding of the role of hope in eschatology to Jewish theologians, such as Ernst Bloch and Franz Rosenzweig.¹¹⁴ In similar fashion to Moltmann, Paul Tillich speaks of an eschatological *Kairos* that breaks into mundane, linear history with something genuinely novel.¹¹⁵ The *eschaton* thus becomes "the point of intersection between eternity and time" in Tillich's theology.¹¹⁶ There is a marked similarity in the previously introduced Jewish theological thinking on time and eternity and the developments as described here within the Christian theology of the same era regarding the transcendental breaking in to human history. However, the underlying dualistic thinking which sees a clear distinction between transcendental and immanent is strongly present; this is criticised by feminist writers, as will follow in chapter two.

In radical eschatology, history's role is totally negated in favour of the present. Bultmann famously wrote about the eschatological opportunity in each moment which we are called to waken.¹¹⁷ For Barth, if that which is in the end is the meaning giving occasion, then also the end becomes the beginning.¹¹⁸ In these versions of Christian eschatology, the purpose

¹¹⁰ Sauter, 'Protestant Theology,' 257.

¹¹¹ J. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, transl. by J W. Leitch (London: SCM Press, 1967), 227.

¹¹² Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 22, 26.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 22, 264.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 29-30; "For the rebirth of messianic thinking out of the catastrophe of Christian humanism in the First World War, we are indebted to Martin Buber, Ernst Bloch and Franz Rosenzweig, Walter Benjamin and Theodor G. Adorno, Gershom Scholem and Margarete Susman... Out of the ruins of historical rationality they rescued hope as a theological category. Without their messianic thinking, eschatology today is literally unthinkable."

¹¹⁵ Sauter, 'Protestant Theology,' 256.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Westhelle, 'Liberation Theology,' 313, quoting R. Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity: History and Eschatology: The Gifford Lectures 1955* (New York: Harper, 1957), 155.

¹¹⁸ Sauter, 'Protestant Theology,' 255, quoting K. Barth from *The Resurrection of the Dead* (1924), transl. by H. J. Stenning (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1933), 110.

ascribed to eschatology lies outwith the historical dimension, at times even opposing it (e.g. Bultmann talks about eschatology that swallows up history¹¹⁹); it is a way of living in the now.

1.3.4 Time and Eschatology in Liberation Theology

Gustavo Gutierrez, in formulating the beginnings of liberation theology, takes note of Moltmann's work and works along similar lines.¹²⁰ For a definition of Liberation Theology's eschatology, Vitor Westhelle quotes the introductory note by Mary P. Engel and Susan B. Thistlethwaite in *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*:

[E]schatology is no longer "the last things" but "those things in our midst." The stress is on a God acting in history and on the need to discover God's direction for abundant life in the midst of our ambiguous and conflict ridden history. Prophecy, then, so intimately connected to eschatological vision and hope, does not involve predicting the future or mapping out the end times, but discerning God's activity in the world now, the meaning of that activity for the community of faith, and the appropriate response.¹²¹

For Westhelle, eschatology is to be understood as that which is liminal, operating in the margins and bringing in justice and equality back into the centre:

Its attempt is to make these margins visible, for they are the turning point to another world, a world that can only be devised by those who dare to stand at its threshold and remove the veil that hides the truth beyond it. And herein lies the meaning of "apocalypse."¹²²

¹¹⁹ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 20, quoted from R. Bultmann, 'History and Eschatology in the New Testament', *New Testament Studies* I/1 (1954), 5-16, at 16.

¹²⁰ G. Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* (revised edition) (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), 92-93.

¹²¹ Westhelle, 'Liberation Theology,' 319, quoting from .M. P. Engel and S. B. Thistlethwaite, 'Introduction: Making Connections among Liberation Theologies around the World,' in *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*, S. B. Thistlethwaite and M. P. Engel (eds.) (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), 1-18, at 14-15.

¹²² Westhelle, 'Liberation Theology,' 322.

In some ways, Liberation Theology shares the existential nature of Barth's and Bultmann's eschatology by shifting the meaning of eschatology to the present, refusing to relegate it into the future dimension.

Gutierrez, however, defines liberation as happening on three levels: the socio-political context, within history and through communion with God.¹²³ Liberation theology then represents a hybrid in eschatological thinking in which on the one hand, the immanent, and with it, the practical implication of eschatology are emphasised, with a focus on the now rather than the future, whilst on the other hand, it understands history as an unfolding of humanization, in line with generally accepted understanding of progress. The hybrid is contradictory because liberation theology seeks to critique the closed-ended view of history as presented by Hegel and his followers, including Francis Fukuyama in the contemporary political/philosophical landscape,¹²⁴ and yet does not fully escape it.

Feminist theology is frequently associated with Liberation Theology. In the coming chapters, I shall review some prominent feminist theologians, investigating the ways in which feminist theology shares Liberation Theology's eschatological perspectives and the ways in which they differ.

Conclusion

Time has been understood variously by the different religions around the globe and across history. In some periods and contexts, time has been mythologised as a life giver and a life destroyer, in others time has been contrasted philosophically with the opposite of time, namely timelessness or understood as an inescapable feature of existence that has always been and always will be, such as infinite time. On rare occasions, time has been depicted as a fully cyclical, ever-repeating series of events with no end (or beginning). However, more often than not, religions describe a *telos* to time's existence: a goal that will ultimately be reached, either by individual humans, or by the whole cosmos or both.

In Judaism and Christianity, the *telos* has traditionally been understood as the ultimate well-being of creation ushered in by God's redeeming acts in history. Both religions have debated

¹²³ Ibid., 323.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 318.

God's relationship with time, and in the last century, sought to find alternative ways of seeing time and God's and our relation to it. In the dichotomy eternity/time, eternity has often taken primacy, in particular within Christianity. In a philosophical version of Christian eschatology, in the Hegelian idea of the World Spirit, the shift was made towards immanent eschatology. In the twentieth century Christian and Jewish theologians sought to highlight transcendence as God's gift to history. Liberation theology negotiates a middle-ground between immanence and transcendence in context of socio-political development that favours the view point of the marginalised. In the following chapters, I will survey the eschatological thinking of feminist theologians from the second and the third wave of feminism, in order to compare and contrast feminist theology's take on time with the findings of this chapter.

Chapter Two: Second Wave Feminist Critique of Traditional Christian Eschatology

Introduction

In this chapter, I will look at the critique of traditional Christian eschatology offered by five different feminist theologians, in an attempt to tease out what their underlying concept of time might be. This is not an easy task due to the fact that none of the writers I quote make much reference to time *per se* in their writings. However, in their version of eschatology we will see how the linear time concept is losing ground in favour of an opening towards something new.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section surveys two pioneering feminist theologians, both from a Catholic background, who have aligned themselves with liberationist theologies in their critique of traditional Western theology. Although I could have chosen other well-known feminist theologians from the second wave of feminism (such as Elizabeth Schuessler Fiorenza or Mary Daly), Rosemary Radford Ruether's work summarises eschatological issues very well and overlaps at points with that of Schuessler Fiorenza.¹²⁵ Mary Daly's work has been influential upon the following generation of feminists and her post-Christian stance is echoed in the second section of this chapter. Alongside Radford Ruether, I have chosen to survey the work of a leading South-American ecofeminist Ivone Gebara whose life-work is constructed from the grass-roots level of Latin American liberation movement and its daily struggles relating to survival and justice.

The second section of this chapter focuses on the influence of Process Thought on feminist theology in general, and how it shapes the feminist understanding of eschatology in particular. I have chosen to give an overview of Hartshornian process philosophy through the

¹²⁵ In *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgement* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), Schuessler Fiorenza formulates a liberationist reading of Revelation; Ruether's *Liberation Theology: Human Hope Confronts Christian History and American Power* (New York: Paulist Press, 1972) lays out the 'Prophetic Principle' which "...denounces religious ideologies and systems that function to justify and sanctify the dominant, unjust social order" (24). This, as well as her critique on eschatology that "has been severed from historical hope" (245) in Ruether's *Sexism & God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1983), align Ruether among feminists influenced by liberation theology. Moreover, Ruether and Schuessler Fiorenza demonstrate methodological similarities in these aforementioned works and both harken back to the broader Jewish apocalyptic/eschatological thinking as a model to be re-utilised.

work of a contemporary North American feminist thea-logian Carol P. Christ, although other modes of Process Thought exist alongside hers within feminist theology.

In the third section of this chapter, I give voice to two British theologians whose work is more recent. It could be argued that their engagement in feminist theology is part of the third or fourth wave of feminism rather than the second.¹²⁶ However, I have chosen to present them here as they offer a critique of and an alternative direction to more ‘classical’ positions in Process Thought/process-relational feminist theology. The first theologian in this section is Emily Pennington, who investigates the possibility of resurrection within a process framework. The second is Elizabeth Stuart, a pioneering queer theologian, through whose contribution the pendulum is swinging back towards traditional eschatology as Stuart offers a hard-hitting response to radical feminist critiques.

Section One: The Liberationist Critique

2.1.1 Rosemary Radford Ruether

Rosemary Radford Ruether is the Carpenter Emerita Professor of Feminist Theology at Pacific School of Religion and the Graduate Theological Union, and the Georgia Harkness Emerita Professor of Applied Theology at Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary. She wrote her doctoral thesis on Gregory of Nazianzus at the end of the 1960s.¹²⁷ In her thesis, Ruether argues that Greek philosophy played a key role in the development of early Christian thought and belief.¹²⁸ Her thesis forms a grounding for her further work in which Ruether argues that Christianity developed in the context of tension between the (Hebrew) prophetic-

¹²⁶ For an overview of the four waves of feminism see Martha Rampton, ‘Four Waves of Feminism,’ Pacific University, Oregon (online at <https://www.pacificu.edu/about/media/four-waves-feminism> : 2015; accessed 19.11.19). In brief, first wave of feminism is understood to have occurred at the end of the 19th Century within the suffragette and temperance movements, the second wave within the Civil Rights and 1960s sexual revolution, lasting till about 1990s; the third way of feminism is based on breaking the binaries as within post-structuralist and post-colonial thinking and bringing in the ‘girlie feminism’/girl power. The fourth wave of feminism is understood to have started around 2012 and is currently on-going, featuring me-too movement; it is breaking into the general cultural consciousness in demanding equality and a voice for all oppressed minorities.

¹²⁷ M. A. Volpe, ‘Rosemary Radford Ruether’ in I. S. Markham (ed.) *The Student’s Companion to the Theologians* (Wiley: Chichester, 2013), 512-514, at 512.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

liberationist traditions and the strong influence of binary, hierarchical and male-centred Greek culture and philosophy. It is her opinion that patriarchal tendencies were deeply inscribed in the development of early Christianity and later Christian theology.¹²⁹

To date, Ruether has written over forty well-received books but she is best known for her 1983 publication of *Sexism & God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*, which has become a classic among feminist theological writings.¹³⁰ In *Sexism & God-Talk*, Ruether lays the foundation for a feminist theology by introducing “the critical principle of feminist theology” which she understands to be “the promotion of the full humanity of women.”¹³¹ From that she draws the influential plumb line for feminist theology:

Whatever denies, diminishes, or distorts the full humanity of women is, therefore, appraised as not redemptive. Theologically speaking, whatever diminishes or denies the full humanity of women must be presumed not to reflect the divine or an authentic relation to the divine, or to reflect the authentic nature of things, or to be the message or work of an authentic redeemer or a community of redemption.¹³²

The methodology Ruether uses is historical-critical and her epistemology is based on sociology of knowledge and social theory more generally, yet she engages with classical texts respectfully.¹³³ Epistemologically, Ruether is an empiricist, arguing that “human experience is the starting point and the ending point of the hermeneutical circle.”¹³⁴ However, “systems of authority try to reverse this relation and make received symbols dictate what can be experienced as well as the interpretation of that which is experienced.”¹³⁵ In this tension, some symbols will lose their meaning over time and “become dead.”¹³⁶ Ruether argues that “Religious traditions fall into crisis when the received interpretations of the redemptive

¹²⁹ For instance, she argues: “The book of Revelation in the NT exhibits the eschatological pattern of late Jewish apocalyptic... This kind of apocalyptic eschatology becomes increasingly distasteful to a Hellenistic Christianity of the late-second to fourth centuries. It resembled too much the Jewish hopes for a divine overthrow of the Roman Empire... Mainstream Christianity focuses on the drama of the personal soul, reborn to eschatological life in Christ.” See R. Radford Ruether, *Sexism & God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1983), 244.

¹³⁰ Volpe, ‘Radford Ruether,’ 512.

¹³¹ Ruether, *Sexism & God-Talk*, 18.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 18-19.

¹³³ H. Eaton, ‘Reflections on the Contribution of Rosemary Radford Ruether,’ *Feminist Theology* 17/2 (2009), 152-157; at 152.

¹³⁴ Ruether, *Sexism & God-Talk*, 12.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 13; Ruether here echoes Paul Ricoeur’s work on metaphors (e.g. *The Rule of Metaphor*, transl. by R. Czerny (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), regarding metaphors losing and gaining meaning; however, the validity of the ‘dead metaphor’ theory has been debated by cognitive linguists in recent debates (see e.g. .Z. Kövecses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002)).

paradigms contradict experience in significant ways.”¹³⁷ She believes that a path out of such crisis comes through “revelatory experiences” which are “breakthrough experiences beyond ordinary fragmented consciousness that provide interpretive symbols illuminating the means of the whole of life.”¹³⁸ The key factor in this renewing and revitalising process is “the ability to combine and transform earlier symbolic patterns to illuminate and disclose meaning in new, unexpected ways that speak to new experiential needs as the old patterns ceased to do.”¹³⁹ She writes:

A religious tradition remains vital so long as its revelatory pattern can be reproduced generation after generation and continues to speak to individuals in the community and provide for them the redemptive meaning of individual and collective experience.¹⁴⁰

In this way Ruether justifies her critique of traditional theology and opens up the possibility for new meanings to emerge that may replace the meanings and readings of traditional symbols and imagery.

The final chapter of *Sexism & God-Talk* focuses on eschatology from a feminist perspective. Ruether starts by summarising Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s position in *His Religion and Hers* (1923) which sees the preoccupation with immortality as a particularly of male concern. For Perkins, “[the] primary human responsibility is to preserve and promote a human life for future generations yet to be born rather than to be narcissistically concerned about one’s individual survival of death.”¹⁴¹ Ruether summarises this position: “Perkins believes that religion needs to be transformed by focusing on the female birth experience rather than on the male death experience.”¹⁴²

Ruether buttresses her critique of the concept of personal immortality by drawing on the original Hebrew concept of a God-intended future. She writes:

¹³⁷ Ruether, *Sexism & God-Talk*, 16.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 236; quoted by Ruether from C. Perkins Gilman, *His Religion and Hers* (New York: Century, 1923).

¹⁴² Ruether, *Sexism & God-Talk*, 236.

Hebrew thought does not fully develop a concept of personal immortality. The basic concept of the human being as mortal, bound by a certain limit of years, remains. Moreover, this limited term of life is regarded as natural and good.¹⁴³

Hebrew apocalyptic thought imagined the promised future as time-limited era (millennium) during which justice, peace and long life would prevail: “Not immortality but a blessed longevity is the ideal realized in the resurrection,” writes Ruether.¹⁴⁴ However, for Ruether, the Greek idea of eternity moved Christian eschatology towards a “double scenario” in which “a historical millennium fulfils the demands of justice and a realized natural life, followed by the end of the world and the creation of a new immortal world where the righteous can live an everlasting life.”¹⁴⁵

This ‘spiritualisation’ Ruether sees evidenced further in the imagery of new birth which in traditional theology is a necessity for salvation: “A new and higher spiritual intercourse, a spiritual conception and birthing in the womb of baptism, overcomes the carnal gestation and birth of human mothers from which we all receive sin and death.”¹⁴⁶ In this frame, for Ruether, “male eschatology [is] built on negation of the mother.”¹⁴⁷ She links this negation of the human birth and human motherhood to the typically individualistic way of looking at sin and salvation: “This individualizing and spiritualizing of salvation is the reverse side of the individualizing of sin.”¹⁴⁸ For Ruether, sin and evil consist in the “naming of the evil, in separating others from the concept of good and acceptable.”¹⁴⁹ Hence, future redemption must consist of a “massive repentance of all humanity, that great metanoia, in which all humans decide to disaffiliate from violence and cooperation with violence. This would deprive the whole system of power and make possible a complete redemption.”¹⁵⁰

Instead of “male eschatology,” Ruether suggests an alternative, more feminine-friendly version of eschatology, based not on fleeing present difficulties and “fleshly struggles” to enter “an unrealized future”, but on “hope and change based on conversions or metanoia.”¹⁵¹ She wishes to replace “me consciousness” which is obsessed with personal and eternal

¹⁴³ Ibid., 238.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 239.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 143-144.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 144.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 215.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 163.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 183.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 254.

survival with “a consciousness of life continuing in others.”¹⁵² In the postscript of *Sexism & God-Talk*, she urges:

Layer by layer we must strip off the false consciousness that alienates us from our bodies, from our roots in the earth, sky and water. Layer by layer we expose the twisted consciousness that has distorted our relationships and turned them to their opposite.¹⁵³

“The return to home” consists of learning “the harmony, the peace, the justice of body, bodies in right relation to each other.”¹⁵⁴ This is “the Shalom of the Holy; the disclosure of the gracious Shekinah; Divine Wisdom; the empowering Matrix; She, in whom we live and move and have our being - She comes; She is here.”¹⁵⁵

Although Ruether’s work has been generally well received and *Sexism & God-Talk* has attained classic status among feminist theological writings, it has also been subject to serious critique. In an article published in *Modern Theology* in 1997, Linda Woodhead, Professor of Sociology of Religion at Lancaster University, points to the difficulty in defining ‘women’s experience’ on which Ruether and other feminist theologians build their theology. Woodhead claims that the empiricist basis for theology is insufficient for serious theological engagement.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, Woodhead warns against the danger of fixing women’s identity on oppression or even, relationality, when identity, she believes, is and needs to remain open ended.¹⁵⁷

However, not everyone agrees with Woodhead. For example, Phyllis Trible, an internationally respected biblical scholar from a Jewish background, praises the thorough work of Ruether which she believes to engage seriously with systematic theology: “By the time Mrs. Ruether finishes, systematic theology has undergone a radical critique from which it emerges transformed rather than simply modified or totally rejected.”¹⁵⁸

Adele McCollum, reviewing Ruether’s work, does not deny Ruether’s tendency to go beyond the canon. However, according to McCollum, “Ruether reads outside the canon without

¹⁵² Ibid., 257.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 259.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 266.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ L. Woodhead, ‘Spiritualising the Sacred: A Critique of Feminist Theology,’ *Modern Theology* 13/2 (1997), 191-212; at 204-206.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 199-200.

¹⁵⁸ P. Trible, ‘The Creation of a Feminist Theology,’ *New York Times* 05 (1983), 28.

leaving it, or attempting to destroy or ignore it.”¹⁵⁹ Like Woodhead, McCollum notices Ruether’s reliance on liberal Christianity/Protestantism, but in McCollum’s view, Ruether “engages Liberal Christian theology to justify her method” so that “inspiration and divine insight appear in contemporary garb.”¹⁶⁰ McCollum sees this as “an aspect of traditional Talmud/Torah study – the belief that God spoke but that both word and law must be reapplied and relived in each generation.”¹⁶¹ McCollum praises Ruether as a “credible theologian and dedicated feminist” who has “complete command of all the tools of the theologian; ...at home with text and form.”¹⁶² She also commends Ruether’s “political sense and grounding in ethical theory” which “allows her to move comfortably in the realms of feminism, third world liberation theory, and social and political philosophy.”¹⁶³

What is useful to note for the context of this thesis are the seeds that Ruether sows in *Sexism & God-talk* which developed into further elaborations of feminist eschatology. Her principle of basing theology on ‘women’s experience’ is adhered to nearly by all the later feminist writers with whom I shall engage in this thesis. Her contention that the male imagery in eschatology must be reversed by shifting the focus from individual to communal survival is a stable feature among ecofeminist writers such as Ivone Gebara and Carol P. Christ. Moreover, in line with Ruether, many feminists, especially those for whom process philosophy gives framework to their thinking, continue to question immortality *in toto*. Ruether’s methodology and epistemology are foundational to much feminist writing but so too are the themes towards which she is pointing in the larger body of her work.

2.1.2 Ivone Gebara

The Brazilian theologian Ivone Gebara is another feminist theologian firmly rooted in liberation politics, who is regarded as a Latin American’s leading feminist liberation theologian.¹⁶⁴ Gebara gained her first degree in philosophy, after which she felt the call to religious life, studied theology in Europe and joined the order of Augustinian Congregation

¹⁵⁹ A. McCollum, ‘Beyond the Bible,’ *The Women's Review of Books* 3/7 (1986), 20.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ E. Nogueira-Godsey, ‘A history of resistance: Ivone Gebara’s transformative feminist liberation theology,’ *Journal for the Study of Religion* 26/2 (2013), 89.

of the Sisters of Our Lady.¹⁶⁵ She returned to Brazil to teach philosophy and theology at ITER (Institute of Theology in Recife) and in the 1970s became its vice-director. The Vatican closed ITER in 1989, to the disappointment of Gebara and others.¹⁶⁶ In the 1990s, due to her outspoken pro-choice stance on abortion, the Vatican forced her into two years of silence. Gebara used the time to study further and then returned to life of teaching, writing and vocation among the poor in the Recife metropolitan area.¹⁶⁷ Gebara identifies herself as an ecofeminist and much of her recent work lies in this area.

Gebara approaches eschatology first of all from the Latin American liberation background and agrees with some of the main principles of that approach. For Gebara, salvation is not something otherworldly but is present and real in the here and now, in the everyday experiences of human life. In *Out of Depths: Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation* she criticises salvation taught by classical Christian theology as potentially oppressive:

Clearly, concentrating on the salvation of one's soul after this life or the resurrection of the body after individual death does not put systems of oppression and exclusion at risk. On the contrary, these ideas run the risk of reinforcing those systems and of giving them the means to continue to produce a false prosperity, which benefits a restricted number of people and countries as well as a false hope for the poor.¹⁶⁸

Gebara's alternative vision of salvation is grounded in the human experience of life and its struggles. She sees salvation as a daily occurrence, not once-in-a-life-time event:

Salvation is not a 'once and for all' solution but a solution for one time, then another time, and then a thousand times. Salvation is like the breath of the Spirit – it blows where it will and as it can. The salvation of Caroline Maria de Jesus, her poor little salvation, was the possibility of having something to eat. Her salvation was being able to record in her journal the monotony of her day, happy to be sitting in her doorway and be 'watched by the moon.' Her salvation was having cleaned up piles of paper and cardboard from the street, selling them and being able to eat eggs with her children.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 91.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 92.

¹⁶⁷ L. A. Lorentzen, 'Gebara, Ivone' (online at <http://users.clas.ufl.edu/bron/pdf--christianity/Lorentzen--Ivone%20Gebara.pdf> ; accessed 18.07.19).

¹⁶⁸ I. Gebara, *Out of Depths: Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation* (Minneapolis: Ausburg Fortress, 2002), 128-29.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 126.

In this touching description, Gebara points to the uselessness of a vision that is far out of reach and draws attention to the importance of lived out theology and further, to potential solutions to these struggles.

A big part of Gebara's ecofeminist understanding of the world is the acceptance of death and evil as part of the (intended) fabric of life. She criticizes the classical polarisation of good and evil which she sees as stemming from Thomistic-Aristotelian epistemology and philosophy.¹⁷⁰ Gebara observes the interconnectedness between what we call evil and good and their relativity. She suggests that:

In a way, we can say that every situation we call bad has something good about it or produced something good from one moment to another, even if it is only a temporary denunciation of evil. Likewise, situations or behaviors we call good contain evil or something bad. We know that what some people call good is oppressive to others.¹⁷¹

Gebara does not acknowledge the biblical myth of initial paradise and warns against the tendency always to look - or to go - either backwards or forwards to find the ideal. Gebara rejects the classic theological explanation for evil and the metaphysical nature of evil. She proposes a pragmatic stance towards evil: instead of looking for its (mythical) origin,

we will simply have to accept that it is our responsibility to console people and to root out the present evil, such as an injustice or a physical suffering, without trying too hard to make sense of it. Often, certain evils escape our understanding, just as do certain experiences of happiness and generosity.¹⁷²

For Gebara, the overall solution to the human condition is found not in eradicating evil but in reaching towards a more balanced life. The key to more balance is found in greater respect for diversity and difference.¹⁷³

In her 1999 book, *Longing for Running Water*, Gebara lays the ground for an ecofeminist epistemology that undergirds its world view. In the opening chapter, she criticises patriarchal linear thinking in establishing knowledge as faulty:

¹⁷⁰ I. Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1999), 42ff.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹⁷² Gebara, *Out of Depths*, 140-41.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 143-44.

Patriarchal epistemology emphasizes a particular quality of knowing: its linearity, or the idea that progress always moves in a straight line. Linear thinking evokes a path of rectitude, a path that clearly manifests positive moral connotations. It is far removed from circuitous thought patterns, which imply twisting, morally devious ways. Along the straight but rocky path of linearity, the purpose of theological knowing always stand out clearly... But if we speak of knowing in linear terms, then we also need to speak of linear causality. This means that we always have to go back to the beginning of the chain to look for causes, and in the end we will find the first cause. This is a kind of circular linearity: the beginning always appears as special, enlightening, and regenerative. To some extent, of course, this view remains meaningful in terms of seeking alternate perspectives. At the same time, however, we need to go beyond this linear model and be open to the complexity of the reality-in-process we really are.¹⁷⁴

Instead of patriarchal epistemology, Gebara sketches an ecofeminist epistemology based on relative, continuously changing and emotionally inclusive human experience. However, Gebara herself is uncertain if the binaries of Greek philosophy can be fully overcome, as she notes that even the liberation theology is steeped in it. She writes:

A major question, then, faces those of us who are seeking new directions. *Is Christianity conceivable apart from the traditional philosophical framework? Are we able to think about it from within other frames of reference that might demand changes in its traditional formulations? Can we reflect on these apart from the dogmatic formulas that have set their stamp on so many centuries? These questions haunt us, and we have not yet found really satisfactory answers.*¹⁷⁵

As previously noted, Gebara has been heavily criticised by the powers in charge in the Roman Catholic church due to her rejection of classic doctrines and her defiant stance against some of the core teachings of the church. Nevertheless, Gebara does not wish to see herself as post-Christian but rather as a reformer within her tradition. She has criticised liberation movements as not sufficiently engaging with women's plight as the poorest of the poor¹⁷⁶ and for their 'coming kingdom' orientated eschatology which Gebara came to reject.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Gebara, *Longing*, 54-55.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 47, emphasis mine.

¹⁷⁶ Nogueira-Godsey, 'A history,' 92.

¹⁷⁷ Ruether, 'Eschatology,' 11, 16.

It has also been argued that much of what Gebara writes is not necessarily unique in feminist theology¹⁷⁸ however her story-telling ability, that is, her ability to relate arguments to real life situations based on her own experience in living among the poor, lends a fresh and compelling edge to her work.¹⁷⁹

Commentators such as Nancie Erhard, however, would prefer deeper academic engagement with what are traditionally seen as key theological principles. Erhard writes:

While I find [Gebara's] premises compelling and many ideas meaningful, she dismisses possibilities without thorough explanation of her grounds. Some of the constructive efforts in the chapters on God and the Trinity need much development and clarity to provide the more adequate expression of Christian faith Gebara seeks.¹⁸⁰

Another reviewer of Gebara's work, Hilda Koster, notes that Gebara's theological proposals rest on the acceptance of her immanent theology:

For instance, she suggests that only evil caused by human beings is a concern for theology, while 'natural violence' should be accepted as part of the 'mystery of relatedness.' Yet, this seems to deny nature the possibility of redemption, which is a rather precarious claim for an ecological theology.¹⁸¹

Koster also criticises Gebara for not connecting the dots between global warming and evil properly where "the line between natural evil and the effects of social injustice is not easily drawn."¹⁸²

What I take from Gebara's work for this thesis is her insistence on staying within a Christian tradition formally while boldly questioning even the most central teachings of the church, namely the nature of salvation and the origin of and nature of evil. For Gebara, there was no original blessedness without death and no future that avoids death and evil, and so to accept life as it is found is the solution, and our task is to bring more balance to where evil has seemingly gained the upper hand. Gebara's theology could be viewed as pragmatic, and as such, it offers a balancing factor to traditionally theory-heavy approach to theology. On

¹⁷⁸ E.g. L. Isherwood, 'Book Reviews: Gebara, Ivone, *Longing For Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation*,' *Feminist Theology* 8/24 (2000), 121.

¹⁷⁹ N. Erhard, 'Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation. (Shorter Reviews),' *Interpretation*, 57/1 (2003), 102.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ H. Koster, 'Reviewed Work: Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation*,' *The Journal of Religion* 81/4 (2001), 652-654; at 654.

¹⁸² Ibid., 654.

Gebara's notion of time, it is difficult to discern clearly what that would be. Gebara seems to speak against linear progress thinking in which causality and end goal have priority; she is firmly rooted in the present, refusing to orientate herself on a hope that is deferred. Dogma is not her area of concern, but rather real lived out life. For that, future imaginings might as well be futile. Gebara calls for acceptance of limited life and does not accept life-after-death scenarios.¹⁸³ It seems her view of the cosmos is static, in the sense of "whatever is has always been and will always be," time with no beginning and no end.¹⁸⁴

Section Two: Process-Relational Feminist Theology

2.2.1 A Brief Overview of Process Thought

Alfred North Whitehead, a British philosopher whose career was mostly focused in the United States, developed Process Thought into a philosophical system based on the contemporary science which at the time (in the 1920s and 1930s) was starting to comprehend material reality consisting of constant flux of atomic and subatomic particles.¹⁸⁵ His student, Charles Hartshorne, further developed Whitehead's ideas and made them better known, in particular by applying Whiteheadian thinking to theology.¹⁸⁶ Hartshorne's student, John B. Cobb, later founded the Claremont School of Process Thought where many feminist theologians have studied, including Catherine Keller. Cobb's contribution has been in bringing Process Thought to bear on "Christian systematic theological categories."¹⁸⁷

Charles Hartshorne, influenced by Whitehead, identified six key teachings in classical theism he believed were misleading or plainly wrong: God's omnipotence, God's omniscience, God's impassibility (which includes the idea that God cannot change), God's unsympathetic

¹⁸³ R. Radford Ruether, 'Eschatology in Christian Feminist Theologies' in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, Oxford Handbooks on line, J. L. Walls (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 328-339; at 337.

¹⁸⁴ This is a reference to Ecclesiastes 3:15 which I read into Gebara's work; Gebara does not seem to share a hope that in future certain issues of oppression will be dealt with once and for all or that history has a revelatory role as Gutierrez believes, see G. Gutierrez, 'Faith as Freedom,' *Horizons* 2/1 (1975), 25-60.

¹⁸⁵ M. A. Coleman, 'Introduction to Process Theology' in *Creating Women's Theology: A Movement Engaging Process Thought*, M. A. Coleman, N. R. Howell and H. Tallon Russell (eds.), (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 12-19; at 12.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

goodness, the infallibility of revelation and immortality of humans after death.¹⁸⁸ Hartshorne advocated a worldview called pan-en-theism ('all-is-in-God') that considers God to be as intimately linked with creation as we are to our bodies but yet affirms that God is more than the creation.¹⁸⁹ Together with Whitehead, Hartshorne believed in God's di-polar nature, consisting of eternal, unchanging primordial character and immanent and changing consequent character. For Whitehead, God was an entity whereas Hartshorne believed that God was more akin to a person that reveals his/her character in actual entities. Process philosophy proposes a different form of immortality which it calls 'objective immortality' based on the continued influence of everything that has lived and further, on the concept of God's memory: Each person and creature that has ever lived lives on in God's memory and hence, is not forgotten and so, in some way could be said to live forever.

Carol P. Christ, among others, has argued that Process Thought provides a philosophy of religion well suited for the feminist cause(s). In a 2011 book, *Creating Women's Theology: A Movement Engaging Process Thought*, prominent leading feminist theologians gathered key texts to demonstrate the compatibility of feminist theologies with Process Thought. Editors Monica A. Coleman, Nancy R. Howell and Helene Tallon Russell refer to the synthesis of Process Thought with feminist principles as *process-relational feminist theology*.¹⁹⁰ In the following section, I will summarise Carol P. Christ's homage to Charles Hartshorne and her take on process-relational feminist theology.

2.2.2 Carol P. Christ

Carol P. Christ has been hailed as the leading theologian – or thea-logian – of the Goddess movement. This became more widely known to the public through Christ and Judith Plaskow's co-operation in *Woman-spirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* in 1979.¹⁹¹ Originally from a liberal Presbyterian background, Christ left Christianity in the 1970s, after having earned a PhD in Religious Studies from Yale. She came to embrace Goddess theology which has striking similarities with process philosophy, a link which she acknowledges and

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., with reference to Charles Hartshorne's book *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984).

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 66.

¹⁹⁰ Coleman, Howell and Russell, *Creating Women's Theology*, xvii.

¹⁹¹ E. Ursic, 'Interview with Carol P. Christ,' *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 33/1 (2017), 137-152; at 137.

corroborates on in her 2003 book *She Who Changes: Re-imagining The Divine in the World*. Christ has taught in many well-known universities and colleges in the US, and is seen as the pioneering theologian in developing ‘embodied theology.’ Christ currently lives in Greece where she is also politically active, in particular in context of environmental issues.¹⁹²

In the opening chapter of *She Who Changes*, entitled ‘Problems with God,’ Christ writes: “I believe that Hartshorne’s criticism of classical theism can help all feminists in religion to become clearer and bolder in our criticisms of traditional views of God.”¹⁹³ In the book, which is dedicated to Hartshorne, Christ looks at the six key objections of Process Thought to classic theism and explains why Hartshorne’s criticism makes sense from a feminist perspective.

Hartshorne and Christ argue that God is not omnipotent; whatever power God has, it is a power that is shared, not power-over, since power-over would ultimately always mean domination.¹⁹⁴ Christ’s Deity is primarily defined by her/his goodness which would be in conflict with any dominating tendencies, and hence, domination must be dropped from the understanding of God rather than goodness. Furthermore, the denial of God’s omnipotence, Christ argues, solves the age-old and stubborn problem of evil: God does not wish evil to happen, it is never in the interest of the Divine. However, evil exists as part of the freedom with which each creature has been endowed.¹⁹⁵ Christ is convinced God is unable to interfere when evil occurs in the world because if she/he was able, her/his goodness would demand it: “If God is a good parent, then God ought to intervene when we go too far.”¹⁹⁶ God then is not only withdrawing her/himself from interfering but in actual fact, cannot, since the power she/he has is fully shared with the creatures.¹⁹⁷ The conclusion of this theology is that the responsibility for curtailing evil lies squarely in the hands of humans.¹⁹⁸ The power the

¹⁹² California Institute of Integral Studies, Faculty and Staff Directory, ‘Carol Christ, Biography’ (online at <https://www.ciis.edu/faculty-and-staff-directory/carol-p-christ> ; accessed 18.07.19).

¹⁹³ Christ, *She Who Changes*, 33.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 93. In her book, Christ uses the term Goddess/God and compound pronouns reflecting both male and female essence of deity she believes in; in my summary of her writing, for simplicity’s sake I have here used ‘God’ (a term I regard sufficiently gender free) but have kept her dual use of pronouns referring to God.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 94-94.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 98.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 102; here Christ utilises Hartshorne’s concept of ‘zero policy’ that dictates that if God is omnipotent and holds all power, then creation is rendered powerless, which would mean, the creation has no freedom of self-expression or self-determination. C. P. Christ, ‘Goddess With Us: Is a Relational God Powerful Enough?’ (online at <https://feminismandreligion.com/2013/09/02/god-with-us-a-relational-god-powerful-enough-by-carol-p-christ/> :2013; accessed 11.01.2020).

¹⁹⁸ Christ, *She Who Changes*, 175.

Divine has is of persuasion or luring, attracting humans and all creatures towards the vision the Divine offers to everyone: that of peace and love, healing and reconciliation.¹⁹⁹

From the denial of omnipotence flows the denial of God's omniscience: although the Divine knows much more than any of the creatures can know at once, the Divine cannot know everything since each creature is truly free to choose their course of action. Christ writes:

It makes sense to say that God knows the future only if it is also assumed that God creates it in every detail. In this case, there is again no room for human freedom. On the other hand, if there is genuine freedom in the world, then God cannot know the future until human beings and other individuals with a degree of freedom actually do make the choices that we will make.²⁰⁰

This gives a hint to Christ's view of time: future is in the making and does not yet exist in any real form. The Divine is active in the moment, lives in the moment and co-creates continually with all of creation at each instant.²⁰¹

One of the main tenets of process philosophy is the idea that life is all about change.²⁰² The process approach rejects the Platonic idea that eternal ideas exist on a supra-natural level from which everything take their essence. It is argued that if everything in our experience that lives changes, then we must draw the conclusion that the creator in whose life we participate, also changes.²⁰³ However, process philosophy affirms a part of the Divine that does not change. This double character of God is defined by the term 'dual transcendence of God': a part of God that doesn't change (her/his character/intentions: God's primordial nature), and another that changes as God lives and interacts with her/his creatures/creation (God's consequent nature).²⁰⁴ Each new individual and event in the world adds to God, so to speak, something that was not there before.²⁰⁵ The classic belief in God's impassibility, the assumption God cannot suffer or change, has to be rejected within this framework.

In much to the same vein Christ, following process philosophy, rejects the idea of God's unsympathetic goodness. This is the idea that God is good but aloof from the creation, due to

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 91.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 39.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 52.

²⁰² Ibid., 45.

²⁰³ Ibid., 46.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 67.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

her/his transcendence.²⁰⁶ Christ argues that God's immanence demands an engaging God who feels with and changes along the creatures and the world which is her/his body. Christ finds home in a panentheistic worldview and regards this as a life and body affirming corrective to classic theism or deism in which the Divine is more transcendent than immanent.

Pantheism also affirms the centrality of relationality to all life: everything is connected and all life takes place in mutual give-and-take relationships.²⁰⁷ Process philosophy takes this a step further and affirms that everything existing, including cells and atoms, has a capacity to feel for others and react with agency which is always expressed relationally.²⁰⁸

On infallibility of revelation, Christ argues that revelation of any kind cannot be infallible due to the fact that all knowledge stems from the body and is subjective/fragmentary.²⁰⁹ In line with post-structural philosophy, Christ believes that each claim to infallible truth has a power interest, an interest for domination that motivates such claims and hence they ought to be distrusted.²¹⁰ Christ writes:

Process philosophy views all claims to authoritative or infallible knowledge as a denial of the fragmentariness of life. I believe feminists in religion must resist the appeal of any spiritual path that asserts that it has all the answers if only we believe, have faith, or submit our will to someone or something. Too much harm has already been done by allegedly infallible authorities.²¹¹

Such cautious approach to the Scriptures opens up other sources and other avenues to discover what gives meaning in life and beyond.

On eschatology, Christ, like Hartshorne, refutes any life-after-death scenarios or prescribed end-of-the-world scenarios. Process philosophy envisages a creator who has always been creating; hence there is no beginning and there is no end.²¹² Since the Divine has given true freedom to all creatures, it cannot be guaranteed that movement into the future has single, teleological direction; the future could well be worse, based on decisions humans as individuals and together as communities make and enact.²¹³ On life after death, Christ writes

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 35.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 70.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 213.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 214.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 158, Christ echoes here Michel Foucault's work on the relation between power and knowledge e.g. in his *History of Sexuality* (vol 1) (London: Allen Lane, 1979).

²¹¹ Ibid., 44.

²¹² Ibid., 52.

²¹³ Ibid., 109-110.

that belief in continued life beyond death is based on denial of the significance of this life. It encourages the rejection of responsibility that comes with freedom in favour of imaginary hopes for something beyond.²¹⁴ Whitehead and Hartshorne both affirm a ‘this-life’ orientation (although other process thinkers, such as David Ray Griffin, have articulated views closer to the traditional stance).²¹⁵ Christ herself is willing to consider a conditional and temporal existence (of soul) after death as a possible model.²¹⁶

Commenting on feminist perspectives on life after death, Christ writes: “The expectation of life after death has played almost no role in Jewish and Christian feminist theology. It has either been assumed or ignored, or declared a matter that we cannot know.”²¹⁷ However, Christ admits that rejecting a hope for life after “is a major departure from traditional Christian and Jewish views.”²¹⁸ She mentions Elizabeth Stuart as an exception among feminists who has “called for the restoration of more traditional understanding of life after death.”²¹⁹

Although she herself denies personal immortality (which in Process Thought is called ‘subjective immortality’), Christ believes in ‘objective immortality’ espoused by Process Thought which is gained through the influence of the actions of each creature, great and small, on the web of life during its life time, which continues to vibrate through the web of life after the death of the individual.²²⁰ Christ notes: “Objective immortality in this sense was crucial for Whitehead and Hartshorne, who felt that unless remembered, our lives could be deemed meaningless.”²²¹

In her work, Christ is pushing for a coherent feminist philosophy of religion that supports her form of feminism and Goddess spirituality. However, in a review of Christ’s work *Diving Deep and Surfacing*, Paula F. Landes has argued that this mission fails due to Christ’s failure to define key terms that underlie her feminist assumptions, including such fundamental aspects as ‘women’s experience’ or ‘reality.’²²² Moreover, mixing a particular personal,

²¹⁴ Ibid., 43.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 258, footnote 14.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 42.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 41.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 42, in reference to Elizabeth Stuart, ‘Elizabeth Stuart Phelps: A Good Feminist Woman Doing Bad Theology?’ *Feminist Theology* 26 (2001), 70-82; Stuart’s critique is expanded on in the next section.

²²⁰ Ibid., 138-9.

²²¹ Ibid., 139.

²²² P. F. Landes, ‘"Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest" by Carol P. Christ (Book Review),’ *Signs* 6/2 (1980), 328-334; at 331.

religious considerations with the academic pursuit confuses matters further. According to Landes, the non-academic thinking undermines the academic aspirations of Christ's work, and vice-versa.²²³

Writing from an Asian feminist perspective, Kwok Pui-Lan is keen to highlight the link between process philosophy and East Asian traditions, which, although acknowledged by Christ, is not developed further.²²⁴ Kwok also calls for greater sensitivity for "the integrity of other philosophies," criticising Christ for not paying sufficient attention to power relationships between religions:

A feminist philosophy of religion needs carefully to rethink the definition of religion and the conceptualization of religious boundaries in light of postcolonial criticism of the field. Christ follows the customary usage of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism as if they were not problematic and makes generalizations about other traditions without attending to historical and regional differences. Although I agree that religious identity and affiliation are fluid, I had hoped that Christ would include a critique of white women's appropriation of non-western symbols and religious resources, given the power differentials.²²⁵

All that being said, *She Who Changes* is one take on process-relational feminist theology. Personally, I disagree with some of the main concepts of Process Thought as presented by Christ. For one, I think it is unimaginable to consider that a creator God who was able to make the universe and all the atoms and quantum particles would in fact be unable to interfere in the human affairs or in anything else pertaining to the creation. The power and intelligence necessary for creating each element, in my mind, must be able to also change anything that has been created. Hence, I cannot agree with Christ's answer to the problem of evil.²²⁶ Secondly, I question the premises of process philosophy. Process Thought is supposedly firmly rooted in empiricism yet it seeks to make metaphysical statements well

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ P-L. Kwok, 'Review: "She Who Changes: Re-Imagining the Divine in the World,"' *Journal of The American Academy of Religion*, 73/1 (2005), 236.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Here I assume a definition of God as the creating agent; however, it is unclear to me whether Carol and other panentheists imagine the creation being similar to our bodies in that we have free agency to direct most of our movements but not all, e.g. growth and development which happen in connection to existing systems. If so, I could accept a model in which God would be unable to change the 'natural' development of her/his body happening in conjunction of existing matter. Nevertheless, even in this analogy the capability, and sometimes necessity, in human body to step in and interfere with 'natural' processes, is present (e.g. operating on cancerous growth or an amputation of a limb) and hence I would argue, ought likewise to be present in the 'Body of God.'

beyond experiential phenomena such as the claim that even smallest of particles have free agency and a capacity to feel for others.²²⁷ I also question Christ's premises in defining God: God's goodness and love are assumed in Christ's theology without an explanation as why Christ believes these to have primacy. This contrasts to Gebara's approach, cited above, which suggests that goodness in our experience always comes with something that could be considered negative, so that absolute goodness does not exist on its own. If this is so, absolute goodness remains a theoretical concept of which we have no concrete experience. To base major assumptions about the construction of the whole cosmos and God on such a theoretical principle seems to me to be a problematic move.

Christ's concept of time seems to favour an Aristotelian cosmology which has no beginning and no end. Process Thought, like much of feminist theology, is based on a presentist outlook of time where past and future are not ontologically on par with the present. On one hand, Christ denies any particular ending – and thus seems to reject teleology but on the other, Process Thought embraces the increasing of life through constant becoming and creation (for instance, God's experience and 'memory' is constantly growing). This harks back to the conclusions made in chapter one, where teleology was denied in certain worldviews although on closer inspection, *telos* is nevertheless discovered to have been implied by them. I suggest that this is also the case with Process Thought and process-relational feminist theology, neither of which is able to unsubscribe fully from the idea of progress.

Section Three: Back to the Future

2.3.1 Emily Pennington

Emily Pennington is an emerging feminist theologian who has written a number of articles on embodied eschatology, the main tenets of which are summarised in her 2016 book *Feminist*

²²⁷ The ability of all matter to feel has recently been argued outwith Process Thought also. See for example K. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, (London: Duke University Press, 2007) and D. Coole and S. Frost (eds.), *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010). However, the point I am pressing here is that it would be empirically impossible to provide evidence of 'feeling' matter where there is no central nervous system and hence such statements stay necessarily theoretical (unless 'feeling' is given a different definition).

Eschatology: Embodied Futures. Pennington currently teaches courses on theological perspectives on gender and feminisms at Catherine of Siena College, linked with the University of Roehampton.²²⁸

In the opening pages of her book, Pennington taps into the lack of vision for eschatology in feminist theology:

Even feminist theologians who do appreciate a sense of eschatological futurity, such as Letty Russell and Rosemary Radford Ruether, are nevertheless cautious in specifying what such an existence may look like. Striving for such specificity can, however, be extremely beneficial: if based on feminist appreciation of embodied relationality, fluidity, and sensuality, eschatology can offer the ultimate affirmation of and hope for the full experience of these.²²⁹

Pennington disagrees with Christ's assertion that the belief in a time when all will be made whole acts like a "psychological anaesthetic."²³⁰ Letty Russell, whom Pennington cites as a potential ally to her quest, writes that "none of us is completely free until we are all free."²³¹ Consequently, and due to the need for justice for those who have died and suffered under oppression without reaching their freedom, "we simply cannot be content with the attitude that this life is all there is."²³² That is, for Pennington, "freedom is incomplete until all are able to experience it."²³³ Due to this, Pennington insists feminist theology needs to open up towards eschatological thinking and imagine what a feminist vision of a future would look like.

Pennington is carefully negotiating questions of human free will and God's final design. She quotes Christ who concluded in her discussion of the Holocaust that either God let it happen because she/he did not care about the victims of the holocaust and the immense human suffering, or God was unable to stop it.²³⁴ As it seems inconceivable to affirm an unloving God, Christ comes to the conclusion that God was unable to stop the holocaust as this was an

²²⁸ University of Roehampton London, 'Staff and Associates: Emily Pennington' (online at <https://www.roehampton.ac.uk/catherine-of-siena/people/> ; accessed 18.07.19).

²²⁹ E. Pennington, *Feminist Eschatology: Embodied Futures*, Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion (Oxon: Taylor&Francis, 2016), 1-2.

²³⁰ Pennington quoting Christ, *She Who Changes*, 37.

²³¹ Pennington, *Feminist Eschatology*, 103, quoting L. Russell from *Becoming Human* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982), 92.

²³² Pennington, *Feminist Eschatology*, 134-135.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 135.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

area of human freedom and human power in which God could not intervene, due to her/his use of shared power rather than power-over. Pennington agrees with the idea that God shares power with free agents; however she wishes to affirm that ultimately, “a relational power can lovingly and respectfully draw all into the full experience of relational freedom.”²³⁵ Here Pennington affirms universalism: God’s loving calling to relationality is such that ultimately it will not be resisted by any.²³⁶ In her universalist stance, Pennington goes against the concept of an open future, as proposed by process philosophy and she also goes against Christ’s conclusion that the future cannot be known and that human free will means that anything is potentially possible. Pennington affirms the mutuality of the process towards *eschaton*, but argues that the process is not entirely mutual²³⁷ and that God’s power compared to humans must be somewhat stronger than that of humans, in order “finally [to] help creation to realise the *eschaton*.”²³⁸

Pennington affirms that human existence is bound to the body; this has implications for her understanding of death. She argues that through the resurrection of the body life after death is promised, or even guaranteed.²³⁹ The corrective to classical Christian eschatology offered here is Pennington’s insistence that death is very real, representing a “complete, albeit temporary cessation of the individual’s existence” and that between death and resurrection an individual does not exist as such in any form, for instance as a soul or a spirit.²⁴⁰ In order to explain how this is possible, Pennington draws on two possible models, one originating from process philosophy relating to ‘divine memory’ according to which the individual continues to be alive in God’s memory;²⁴¹ and another from Russell Herbert according to which “[the] dead are not lost but preserved in God, by God’s faithfulness and power alone.”²⁴² In both cases, the explanation seems somewhat lacking: in what sense does one live in memory? In what ways can the dead be preserved if the body on which life is dependent is fully decayed, its materiality taken up by other organisms into new forms of life?

²³⁵ Ibid., 14.

²³⁶ Ibid., 95.

²³⁷ Ibid., 45.

²³⁸ Ibid., 96.

²³⁹ Ibid., 95, as Pennington subscribes to universalism, I understand this to mean that ultimately all people will be resurrected from the dead to reach their full potential.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 152.

²⁴¹ Christ, *She who Changes*, 139, as quoted in Pennington, *Feminist Eschatology*, 154.

²⁴² Pennington, *Feminist Eschatology*, 154 quoting from R. Herbert, *Living Hope: A Practical Theology of Hope for the Dying* (Peterborough: Epworth Press: 2006), 125.

Pennington notes the difficulty, especially that relating to the idea of ‘memory:’ her critique of the idea of ‘divine memory’ includes the absence of any element of relationality. Memory does not afford the hallmarks of a relationship which has to include two (living) agents. If “relationality lies at the core of our very beings” then without relationality, surely, life as such cannot exist; a memory of a person does not allow continued relationality and hence, for Pennington, Christ’s/Hartshorne’s version of life after death, ‘objective immortality,’ is not sufficient.²⁴³ An added difficulty with ‘preservation via memory’ lies in the traditional Christian teaching about the resurrection of Jesus. Pennington emphasises that according to the Gospels, Jesus’ risen body displayed continuity with the suffering body that had died: the scars on Jesus’s body are visible even though they are not felt.²⁴⁴ If, then, God was to recreate an individual at some later time, completely, by memory, the body/individual would be a new version and not a continued existence of what was before, and hence, would not be resurrected (‘cloned’ comes to my mind as a possible description of such a process). Pennington feels that the idea of preservation through Divine memory, due to issues such as explained above, does not fit well within a feminist theological framework. The explanation Pennington relies on to affirm the continued existence of the body in the resurrection, lies in Herbert’s suggestion of “by God’s faithfulness and power alone;” unfortunately Pennington does not elicit more on this subject to make it more understandable.²⁴⁵

The most novel suggestion Pennington brings in her book is the idea of ‘tactile future.’ Pennington wishes to bridge the gap between ‘now’ and eschatological future by suggesting that the *eschaton* can be experienced here and now by touching the very body which will have continuity through the resurrection of the dead: “touch can function as a sign and embodiment of the *eschaton*.”²⁴⁶

While Pennington’s synthesis is fresh and thought-provoking, Pennington stops short of fully delivering what she hoped to establish, namely “specifying what such an existence may look like.”²⁴⁷ On one hand, Pennington affirms the continuity of bodily existence of the very same body that exists now, on the other she gives very little detail about how such existence is

²⁴³ Pennington, *Feminist Eschatology*, 154, 105. Pennington quotes Norman Wirzba’s definition: “‘to be’ is always already ‘to be in relation’ with others,” in ‘The Touch of Humility: An Invitation to Creatureliness,’ *Modern Theology* 24/2 (2008), 225-244; at 235.

²⁴⁴ Pennington suggests in the resurrection, there is a memory of the pain that one underwent in life but the pain is not felt when remembering it: “remembering pain but not remembering in pain.” Pennington, *Feminist Eschatology*, 145.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 154, quoting Herbert, *Living Hope*, 125.

²⁴⁶ Pennington, *Feminist Eschatology*, 168.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 1-2.

identical to or differs from bodily existence now or regarding what might be the purpose of resurrection if future existence is more or less the same as now. If God wanted us to live forever, what then is the purpose and function of dying?

Intriguingly, Pennington wishes to affirm that the resurrected bodily existence as imagined does not necessarily involve immortality. It seems this would then mean that everyone will have a second chance of life, for the sake of justice, after which the same bodies that have been resurrected will die once more (in order to be resurrected again?).²⁴⁸ For the purpose of my thesis, unfortunately, Pennington's concept of time that is underpinning her worldview is not made clear. However, Pennington's bold suggestion to imagine an alternative vision for a life-after-death scenario within feminist framework is welcome. I will take this up in the final chapter.

2.3.2 Elizabeth Stuart

Elizabeth Stuart is a Professor of Christian Theology at the University of Winchester and the founding chair of the Centre for the Study of Christianity and Sexuality.²⁴⁹ She is a founder and a previous co-editor of the academic journal *Theology and Sexuality* and has written a number of pioneering books on queer theology. Stuart argues that "it is the Christian duty to refuse to work theologically" with the categories of gender and sexuality since these are "not matters of ultimate theological concern."²⁵⁰ For Stuart, this does not represent a new direction in theology but a return to earlier Christian tradition which insists that gender and sexuality ought not represent categories of division.²⁵¹

²⁴⁸ In personal exchange of emails, Pennington explained that she defines immortality not mainly in terms of death versus life but in the context of vulnerability, and that eternity which is stripped of its classic connotations with timelessness and disembodiment is the possibility she envisages.

²⁴⁹ E. Stuart, 'Dr Elizabeth Stuart / Profile / Biography' (online at <https://lgbtreligiousarchives.org/profiles/elizabeth-stuart> :2003; accessed 18.07.19).

²⁵⁰ Ibid., here Stuart could be seen aligned with third wave of feminism which according to Martha Rampton is about celebration of ambiguity and marked by refusal "to think in terms of 'us-them.' Most third-wavers refuse to identify as 'feminists' and reject the word that they find limiting and exclusionary. Grrl-feminism tends to be global, multi-cultural, and it shuns simple answers or artificial categories of identity, gender, and sexuality. Its transversal politics means that differences such as those of ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, etc. are celebrated and recognized as dynamic, situational, and provisional. Reality is conceived not so much in terms of fixed structures and power relations, but in terms of performance within contingencies. Third wave feminism breaks boundaries." Rampton, 'Four Waves.'

²⁵¹ See e.g. E. Stuart, *Gay and Lesbian Theologies: Repetitions with Critical Difference* (London: Routledge, 2017).

In her 2001 article on Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (1844-1911), a key contributor to the first wave of feminism and author of *The Gates Ajar* (1868), Stuart questions the generally accepted focus in recent feminist literature on this life only. Responding to Rosemary Radford Ruether's notion of an ecological theology of death, as follows, Stuart argues:

By pretending that we can immortalise ourselves, our souls, and perhaps even our bodies for some future resurrection, we are immortalising our garbage and polluting the earth. If we are really to learn to recycle our garbage as fertiliser for new growth, our waste as matter for new artefacts, we need a spirituality of recycling that accepts ourselves as part of that process of growth, decay, reintegration into the earth and new growth.²⁵²

Ruether's concept of continuing life after death includes the idea of being absorbed and recycled materially through the natural processes and hence taken back into the earth which is seen by ecofeminists and process theologians to be the body of God.²⁵³ For Stuart, this potentially results in rejecting the very values feminist theologies have wished to confirm:

Feminist theology has always valued embodiment and relationality at the heart of human personhood yet ultimately declares that these things are destined to become wastage, to be recycled, certainly, but into something they were not before. Even while it declares otherwise, much feminist theology thus suggests that embodiment and relationality have no ultimate value. To situate the human life purely within the ecological round necessarily involves the adoption of a certain fatalism and an implicit acceptance of 'natural wastage.'²⁵⁴

Stuart argues that such concept of death ultimately denies the value of the individual to the divine "except as some kind of recycled food." She remarks, quite bitinglly:

Perhaps such a fate is an acceptable, maybe even comforting, one for those of us who create most of the garbage. In offering ourselves ultimately to the greater recycler our guilt at expending too much in the meantime is salved. And those of us who make the most waste are also the ones most likely to live long, comfortable and fulfilled lives.

²⁵² Stuart, 'Elizabeth Stuart Phelps,' 79.

²⁵³ Ibid., Stuart quoting from R. Radford Ruether, 'Ecofeminism and Healing Ourselves, Healing the Earth,' *Feminist Theology* 9 (1995), 51-62; at 61.

²⁵⁴ Stuart, 'Elizabeth Stuart Phelps,' 79-80.

This should make us suspicious of own theology which provides too slick an answer to the ‘problem’ of life after death.²⁵⁵

As further criticism against the tendency in feminist theologies to concentrate on the here and now, Stuart argues that too close a focus on the present impoverishes life experience on the whole and diminishes our hope:

In depriving itself of a heaven feminist theology also deprives itself of a sacred space, another world, another dimension, the future-present from which to gain a perspective on the past-present and the present. It jettisons a place where it is safe to play with understandings of identity, relationships and matters of ultimate concern like God, a place for imagination to flourish. It damns itself to the unforgiving and suffocating present.²⁵⁶

The final argument Stuart brings against no-life-after-death scenario rests on the very insistence of feminist theologies to ground theology on women’s experiences. Stuart quotes a study conducted in Britain in 1995 which shows that women are almost twice as likely as men “to believe in some sort of afterlife and much more likely to feel the presence of the dead.”²⁵⁷ The conclusion Stuart wishes to draw from the study is that feminists have unwittingly taken a male stance in the current climate of dismissing supernatural and life-after-death hopes which does not accurately reflect the beliefs and experiences of many women in Britain and elsewhere.

Stuart’s challenge to feminist eschatology has not been taken up widely; however, Stuart’s argumentation has gravitas. As quoted above, Ruether writes that often an eschatological stance is assumed without much discussion among feminist writers. This might hide a good number of feminists who do not wish to depart radically from the traditional schema, although they may wish to critique and revise it. Stuart portrays various alternative speculations about life-after-death that circulated at the time of writing *The Gates Ajar*, some of them affirming sensuous bodily existence that involves sexual pleasure. Feminist theologies have perhaps been too shy to propose alternative visions in this fashion that would affirm the feminist values of continued relationality and embodiment.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 80.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., quoting from D. Davies, ‘Contemporary Belief in Life After Death’ in *Interpreting Death: Christian Theology and Pastoral Practice*, P. C. Jupp and T. Rogers (eds.) (London: Cassell, 1997), 130-142.

In her understanding of time, Stuart is steering back towards a traditional Christian eschatology that has something specific to say about the future. She argues that a perspective from the future can enrich the present in ways that present without a prescribed future cannot. I read Stuart as implying that such a prescribed future can have a meaning-giving function that we ought to be wary of losing.

Chapter Three: Metaphors in the Making

Introduction

In this final chapter, I first consider the influence of third wave feminism on feminist theological writing before proceeding to discuss themes raised by a feminist critique of the concept of time. The third wave of feminism, which is considered to have occurred between 1990 and 2000, has its philosophical roots in the post-colonial and post-modern critique on the predominant Western (white, heterosexual, patriarchal) culture.²⁵⁸ Additionally, third wavers asserted ‘girliness’ as a legitimate expression of feminism, as in the ‘girl power’ of pop icons such as Spice Girls in their various depictions of the feminine.²⁵⁹ In this chapter, I use the work of Catherine Keller to point towards some of the influences of post-structuralism and post-modernism on feminist theological thought, some of which have already been raised in the previous chapter. For example, Christ’s insistence on avoiding any final truths echoes Foucault’s critique of knowledge as power. Similarly, the general focus on the present rather than on the future could be regarded as a post-modern influence on Process Thought/process-relational feminist theology.²⁶⁰ Keller’s challenge to traditional eschatology has to do with breaking of patterns in Western apocalyptic/dualistic thinking in order to make space for alternatives. This harks back to Julia Kristeva’s ‘Stabat Mater’²⁶¹ and to the work of other feminist theologians who have been influenced by continental philosophy, such as Ellen T. Armour and Grace Jantzen.²⁶²

In the second section of this chapter, a discussion of the themes that have been highlighted in the review of the literature are utilised to distil the relevance of the time concept to feminist

²⁵⁸ Rampton, ‘Four Waves.’

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ E.g. Madan Sarup identifies postmodernism with the tendency to fragment time “into a series of perpetual presents,” in *An Introductory Guide to Post-structuralism and Postmodernism* (2nd ed.) (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 132.

²⁶¹ J. Kristeva, and A. Goldhammer, ‘Stabat Mater,’ *Poetics Today* 16 ½, *The Female Body in Western Culture: Semiotic Perspectives* (1985), 133-152.

²⁶² See *Feminist Philosophy of Religion*, P. S. Anderson and B. Clack (eds.), for debate between continental and analytical philosophy within feminist discourse and critique on post-modern influence on feminist theology; also Ellen T. Armour’s chapter on post-structuralist influence. E. T. Armour, ‘A Post-structuralist Approach’ in *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion*, Critical Readings Series, P. S. Anderson and B. Clark (eds.) (London: Routledge, 2004), 42-53.

theology in general and eschatology in particular. I consider in what ways feminist theology is teleological by nature, in spite of its critique of a patriarchal goal-orientated eschatology.

In the third and final section of this chapter, I coin a metaphor to offer a concept of time that I hope reflects the feminist values and concerns that have been considered in this thesis. It is my hope that this will inspire others to find creative and new ways to think about time. This can ease the pressure of letting go of concepts that may have served well in the past but which now need to be retired.

Section One: Surfing the Wave

3.1.1 Catherine Keller

Catherine Keller is Professor of Constructive Theology in The Theological and Graduate Schools of Drew University in the United States. Keller wrote her PhD in the Claremont Graduate University in the 1980s and since has pioneered a theology of becoming, “a work of complicated lineage and open future” which “interweaves a postmodern biblical hermeneutic with process cosmology, post-structuralist philosophy and an evolving feminist cosmopolitics.”²⁶³ Keller has written a number of significant books and articles, including *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World* (1996) and *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (2003). Keller is also the director of the annual Drew Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquium which fosters postcolonial and pluralist ecumenism and produces co-edited series on related themes.

In *Face of the Deep*, Keller offers a close analysis of the Hebrew text of Genesis which in her understanding does not support the *creatio ex nihilo* doctrine that came to be accepted as the norm in Christianity. Keller points to the ‘waters of the deep’ (*tehom*) from which the created universe arises. She argues that Christianity came to reject this side of the creation story due to *tehomophobia*, the fear of the deep, which was symbolically linked to the female

²⁶³ Drew University, ‘About Catherine Keller’ (online at <https://depts.drew.edu/tsfac/keller/index.html> ; accessed 16.07.19).

body/feminine.²⁶⁴ In her engagement with the Hebrew Scriptures and literature, Keller calls for the acceptance of the chaotic, as part of God's nature, as well as of the womb-like basis for all creaturely existence.²⁶⁵ Keller has also made this point elsewhere, for example in her criticism of Richard Kearney's 'Endless Morning' in which Kearney proposes a traditionally sounding 'happy end' to the world-process.²⁶⁶ In Keller's words:

Does Kearney's rising-sun God preclude all future resistance to its own goodness?
Would this be a form of what I call light *supremacism*—a cultural passion to annihilate the darkness, whether evil, mystical, epidermal—or uteral?²⁶⁷

Keller argues that in the watery birth imagery of the Genesis account and its chaotic, darkness infused power we are invited to welcome and accept these aspects of life and not to devalue them as less than divine.

In *Apocalypse Now and Then* Keller summarises the different approaches to apocalyptic Christians have taken over the course of two millennia.²⁶⁸ Keller identifies Augustine as the source of anti-apocalyptic thinking that long prevailed in the Church. However, at the same time, Augustine sowed the seeds of later millennialism: "Augustine wisely counsels a deliteralization of millennialism," Keller writes, even though later "in its *locus classicus*, Augustine's *City of God*, as ever after, anti-apocalypse demonstrates an unacknowledged and therefore irresponsible cathexis to apocalypse."²⁶⁹ With anti-apocalyptic thinking Keller means the dismissal of apocalyptic schema *in toto* which however, according to Keller, comes to bite back with vengeance: "A sharpened anti-apocalypse may remain blind to its own apocalypse, but it clears the cultural space for the differentiated theological discourse it cannot itself perform."²⁷⁰

²⁶⁴ C. Keller, *Face of the Deep: a theology of becoming* (London: Routledge, 2003), 39, 238.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁶⁶ Keller is making a reference to the final words in R. Kearney, 'Enabling God' in *After God: Richard Kearney and the Religious Turn in Continental Philosophy*. Vol. no. 49, J. P. Manoussakis (ed.) (Ashland, Ohio: Fordham University Press, 2006), 39-54; at 54.

²⁶⁷ C. Keller, 'Kearney's Endless Morning' in *After God: Richard Kearney and the Religious Turn in Continental Philosophy*, vol. 49, J. P. Manoussakis (ed.) (Ashland, Ohio: Fordham University Press, 2006), 355-361; at 360.

²⁶⁸ C. Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 20.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

The tendency among some “conservative Christian literalists” to interpret the apocalyptic texts of Scripture as having direct meaning for the present time Keller labels ‘retro-apocalyptic’:

These communities understand the text to speak immediately to our own present: when John was speaking about the tribulations, the endtime, the great whore, he meant us, now, two thousand years later. No process of interpretive mediation between contexts is required, because there is no context but the Lord’s. ²⁷¹

However, even more curious phenomenon is the crypto-apocalyptic that currently dominates the cultural landscape of contemporary America. By crypto-apocalyptic thinking Keller means the impact apocalyptic categories have on culture and subconscious even though consciously a person might confess an anti-apocalyptic stance: “It drifts in the subliminal margins, not really inaccessible to awareness but unaccountable to it.” ²⁷²

The liberationist interpretation of eschatology offered by Gutierrez, Moltmann, Ruether and Schuessler Fiorenza Keller calls *neoapocalyptic*: In this version of apocalyptic the essence of the apocalyptic/eschatological message is distilled to a potent message of hope, liberation, justice and judgement and is claimed for the here and now. ²⁷³ Keller adds to this list of influential theologians from the liberationist front-line, the British ecofeminist theologian Anne Primavesi, whose version of neoapocalypse Keller calls the ‘greenest’ of them all: Primavesi claims “Apocalypse is not postponed until the end of time, but is a vision *of how things really are at this moment*.” ²⁷⁴ Keller writes: “Such neoapocalypticists mobilize the text to preach warning and renewal rather than transcendent doom and closure.” ²⁷⁵

However, Keller does not locate herself in any of these approaches. Instead, she suggests a *counter-apocalypse* that neither denies apocalyptic categories nor attempts to use them. In proposing this approach, her aim is to break open the apocalyptic/eschatological thinking in which “Western culture and thought have been captured and kept frozen.” ²⁷⁶ Keller argues that apocalyptic thinking (which she calls the ‘apocalyptic habit’) is so steeped into the sea bed of the Western psyche that it is almost impossible to escape it; by apocalyptic thinking

²⁷¹ Ibid., 7.

²⁷² Ibid., 8.

²⁷³ Ibid., 17.

²⁷⁴ A. Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis: Ecology, Feminism, and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 2.

²⁷⁵ Keller, *Apocalypse*, 18.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 19.

she means the idea of progress and linear history towards a goal, and dualistic categories of either/or.²⁷⁷ In her criticism of this manner of thinking, she is also criticizing feminist theology itself which has sought to find its enemy in patriarchy and setting itself over and against it as the next progressive step in human history.²⁷⁸ Keller dreams of feminism that escapes apocalyptic categories, and which “joins the postmodern protest against the authoritarianism of any single end to history.”²⁷⁹

Keller suggests that an attitude of accepting “finitude without finality” is a key to this new frame of mind.²⁸⁰ She finds a “rhythmic, cyclic heliacal movement” in nature, mirrored in the textual structure of the book of Revelation, and sees this as parallel to a new life found through death and decay.²⁸¹ Although Keller speaks of a cyclical, natural rhythm, she rejects both the cyclical concept of time and the linear, teleological concept of time. She writes: “Neither a circle of mechanical repetitive time nor a linear sequence of pure succession yield the opening needed at the end of modernity.”²⁸² For Keller, the answer lies in ‘timeliness’ rather than seeking ‘timelessness’, that is, being in the here-and-now purposefully, without a prescribed end or beginning:

Timeliness, not timelessness, well-timed attention to historical moments of opportunity and to natural cycles of renewal will shape a new sense of the endless finitude of earth-beings in relationship.²⁸³

Keller relates this concept of ‘timeliness’ to the biblical *kairos* moment:

The theology of radical relation will thus claim the biblical attention to historical moment, to *kairos* not as the transcendence of time but as the fullness of time, the disruption of the closed time-circles and of dead-end dead-lines of patriarchal realized eschatology or apocalypse.²⁸⁴

²⁷⁷ E.g. see Keller, ‘Why Apocalypse?’ 195 and Keller, *Apocalypse*, 11.

²⁷⁸ Keller, ‘Why Apocalypse?’ 192.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Keller, *Apocalypse*, 274.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 31.

²⁸² Keller, ‘Why Apocalypse?’ 195.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

Elsewhere, Keller has suggested methods as how to escape the finalities that so easily creep into our thinking and theologies. In ‘Theopoiesis and the Pluriverse: Notes on a Process’ Keller writes of *poiesis*, the making of God in our imaginations, through the naming God.²⁸⁵ She notes how, by naming God, we give definitions and new concepts to God, and through the process, to ourselves. Keller quotes Luce Irigaray for whom becoming divine equates becoming more authentically human and vice versa: “we generally fail to recognize that becoming divine corresponds to becoming perfectly human.”²⁸⁶ From this follows that by ‘making’ God, we are making ourselves. In process theology, this creative process of becoming does not take place in isolation from but in relationship with the Divine.²⁸⁷ However, this making, in Keller’s view, is an unstable and a continuous process. In other words, Keller wishes to leave open the question of what God is or is not; at the same time the articulation of our human capacity/becoming is left open-ended.²⁸⁸

Reviewers have criticized Keller of not succeeding in bringing forth something fully novel and workable. Her approach is not novel since attention to the present is found in earlier thinkers such as Heidegger (‘within-timeness’), as well as in Moltmann and to some extent in the radical eschatology of Bultmann and Barth. It is not workable since “the inner logic of these complex relationships is less than fully spelled out.”²⁸⁹ Even Keller does not fully escape apocalyptic thinking, argues Ted Peters in his review of *Apocalypse Now and Then*, echoing Pamela Sue Anderson’s assertion that “There can be no facile end to the present social-symbolic order, to philosophy, to history or to the dominant religious myth of patriarchy.”²⁹⁰ Considering Keller’s suggestion of a fully presentist worldview, based on nature’s rhythmic cycles, Peters notes that the “experience of cyclical time is strictly limited to earth, not the cosmos,” and continues:

²⁸⁵ C. Keller, ‘Theopoiesis and the Pluriverse: Notes on a Process’ in *Theopoetic Folds: Philosophizing Multifariousness*, Fordham Scholarship Online, R. Faber and J. Fackenthal (eds.) (online at <https://fordham.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.5422/fordham/9780823251551.001.0001/upso-9780823251551:2014>; accessed 17.02.20), 179-194; at 184.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 183.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 184.

²⁸⁸ C. Keller, ‘Self and God’ in *Creating Women’s Theology: A Movement Engaging Process Thought*, M. A. Coleman, N. R. Howell and H. Tallon Russell (eds) (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 85-97; at 96-97.

²⁸⁹ T. Peters, ‘Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Approach to the End of the World,’ *Theology Today* 07/1997, 243-246; at 246.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.* and P. S. Anderson, *Feminist Philosophy of Religion: The Rationality and Myths of Religious Belief* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 156.

Even though she cites physicist Friedrich von Weizsacker, she fails to integrate von Weizsacker's main point, namely, that, cosmologically speaking, nature has a history. It is not rhythms that are fundamental to natural processes, even though rhythms are present; but rather, in the largest sense, nature too is made up of contingent events in sequence and spread out through time that runs from the past toward the future. Nature has a history. Keller's zeal to reduce the stress of apocalypticized historical consciousness may be laudable; but her counter-apocalypse is weakened if it is counter-nature.²⁹¹

Unfortunately Peters himself misreads Keller as a proponent of cyclical time. As seen above, Keller argues against the binary distinction between linear versus cyclical time concepts and proposes an alternative, 'timeliness,' which cannot be represented by a simple shape but is a way of living in time.

What I take from Keller's engagement with apocalyptic ideas is her attempt to deconstruct the complex range of influences that teleological end-of-the-world scenarios have had and continue to have on the Western culture and psyche. In this sense, Keller's criticism of feminism and liberationist thinking, both of which also tend to be acted out in apocalyptic (and hence, patriarchal) categories, has to be noted. In search for an authentic and invigorating feminist concept of time, Keller has urged the embracing of "finitude without finality."²⁹² This unapologetically paradoxical expression seems to communicate an end without an ending.

One way to solve this paradox is to consider the cyclical view of time where the end of the circle is also the beginning of the same circle; the circle can be said to have neither an end nor a beginning, but it can also be said to have a particular end and starting point; furthermore, such a point could be found anywhere on the circle. However, Keller has eschewed the purely cyclical notion of time and instead has described a rhythmic helical movement to time. I cannot help but mentally associate the helix with the double helix of DNA which humans have mapped into a genetic code, that is, into a linear form, even though the construct of DNA consists of 3-D relations of the genes to one another. This mapping process provides a reminder that reality can be described a certain way even though it is much more complex by nature: the human genome can be put into a string of letters in a

²⁹¹ Peters, 'Apocalypse Now And Then,' 245.

²⁹² Keller, *Apocalypse*, 274.

linear form when in reality it is multidimensional, relational and twisting. Both are valid depictions, or approximations, of reality, without exhausting the descriptive potential for further depictions.

In this context I wish to briefly mention the French philosopher Henri Bergson's maxim in his philosophical thinking. John Mullarkey, a commentator on Bergson, describes Bergson's philosophical method as one in which "all conceptual dualism is exposed."²⁹³ Mullarkey suggests that this is highly significant: "It is the metaphilosophical realisation that there is no single foundation or principle on which philosophy can take its stand...there are no 'first philosophies'," because "if everything is changing, then this must be true for philosophy as well."²⁹⁴ What I wish to highlight here is the breaking of certainties, even the certainties of philosophy itself, that is present already in early twentieth-century (continental) philosophy. When thinking of time, we tend to search for models that are stable and capable of fitting within our inherited or learned framework of thinking. However, if everything is changing, time itself might be subject to change; it might not be homogenous by nature but heterogenous or even evolving.²⁹⁵

Section Two: Time in Feminist Theology

3.2.1 *Telos* in Feminist Theology

Feminist theologies based on Process Thought assume the existence of a life-force or a relational Deity who in partnership with created matter brings forth further life through a creativity principle. In general, the feminist critique of Christian eschatology as surveyed in this thesis tends to eschew a strictly teleological view of history in traditional Christian eschatology. However, closely inspected, feminist theologies might still embrace a hidden *telos* in their version of (counter/anti-) -eschatology.

²⁹³ J. Mullarkey, *Bergson and Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 3-4.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ In principle, this is also what Einstein's Theory of Relativity suggests. It contradicts the Newtonian /Absolute view on time according to which time is constant and independent of events/change. For a discussion regarding of the absolute theory of time and the relative theory of time, see for example C. D. Broad, 'Time' in *The Philosophy of Time*, Critical Concept in Philosophy series, vol. I, L. N. Oaklander (ed.) (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), 143-173.

It has been suggested by feminist writers that instead of a vision of life beyond death/this earth, it is the flourishing of all creation that is the main aim of Deity who invites and lures creation to partner in Her/His vision. Evil exists only to that extent to which creation is failing to respond to this lure positively.²⁹⁶ If evil, defined this way, were to become rarer and rarer as the Divine's invitation is becoming more widely accepted, would this not be the *telos* of the whole creation? Is this not what the feminist theologians put their hope on when calling for "that great metanoia" (Ruether) or for a pragmatic case-by-case salvation in the here and now (Gebara)?

Hannah Arendt sought a celebration of natality instead of Heideggerian being-toward-death.²⁹⁷ Her ideas were taken up and further developed by feminist thinkers (such as Grace Jantzen in *Becoming Divine*, chapter six).²⁹⁸ Patriarchal theology has a tendency to emphasise the end of all life as the meaning-giving event; feminist writers reversed that by giving emphasis to the beginning of life rather than the end.²⁹⁹ Similarly, the shift could be made, and has been made, to emphasise the early/mid-point of human life as that which gives meaning: the (young) adult phase with maximum health and reproductive ability. In fact, the case could be made that the current Western cultural climate idolises this phase of human life as the ultimate being-onto-life and prosperity. The shifting focus regarding the defining phase in human life relativises teleological thinking. In the debates about teleology the function of (shifting) narration plays an important role. Ultimately, it could be argued that teleology is the product of human narration and hence always evolving, in line with Paul Ricoeur's work on the power and function of narrative.

Ecofeminist Sallie McFague has suggested that instead of a definite *telos*, there is a prescribed direction within process-relational feminist theology. The direction is overarching and includes the whole of cosmos; it is not just limited to the human life span. McFague labels the direction as 'the renewal of life':

[W]e can say that God's action as the spirit of the body is twofold. The spirit is the source of life, the breath of creation; at the same time, the Holy Spirit is the source of

²⁹⁶N. R. Howell, 'Women, Whitehead, and Hartshorne,' 18-19.

²⁹⁷ H. Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958), 246.

²⁹⁸ G. Jantzen, *Becoming Divine: Towards a feminist philosophy of religion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

²⁹⁹ Jantzen suggests "making birth the central category for political and philosophical thought." Jantzen, 'Becoming,' 144.

the renewal of life, the direction or purpose for all the bodies of the world – a goal characterized by inclusive love.³⁰⁰

The beginning, the middle or the end point of human life might not have priority over the others. Rather, they are all conducive to life's being renewed, whether through the recycling of the material in natural processes or through the passing on of genes and knowledge to the next generation. If renewal of life can be asserted as operating on all levels of life on earth as we know it, then perhaps this continual renewal of life can be affirmed as the overarching intent behind life on earth.

To bring this to bear on the concept of time, 'renewal of life' as an overall direction might imply linearity as well as cyclicity. The renewal of life cycle could be depicted as a cycle where the *telos* or the meaning of the cycle is the cycle itself. However, Process Thought is not quite content with the idea of cycle alone; it affirms also that both creator and creation are in the process of becoming and that each experience adds to the being of God.³⁰¹ The imagery here could be of a snowball rolling down the hill, becoming bigger and bigger, or of an ever-widening spiral. On each cycle, something new is added, something new learned. And so, Process Thought itself bears the hall-marks of gradual progress into something larger (and better) and could be said to support a spiral notion of time similar to that proposed in Judaism.

3.2.2 The Conundrum in Panentheism

There is a conundrum of metaphysics that feminists must answer: on one hand, feminist theologians assume the existence of God, based on their experience in life. In their commitment to embodiment, many feminists have come to view the world as God's body, saying, that indeed, God exists in and through material just as we do.³⁰² Some feminist have adopted a pantheist worldview about the nature of reality: everything IS God including us. But many feminists depend on the panentheistic notions of God which is proposed in Process Thought: the world is God's body but God, ontologically speaking, is MORE THAN the

³⁰⁰ S. McFague, 'Ecofeminism and Nature' in Coleman, Howell and Russell, *Creating Women's Theology*, 113-124; at 123.

³⁰¹ M.A. Coleman, 'Introduction to Process Theology' in Coleman, Howell and Russell, *Creating Women's Theology*, 12-19; at 17.

³⁰² E.g. Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: an ecological theology* (London: SCM, 1993).

world. If then many feminist theologians are willing to accept ‘more than’ clause in God’s existence, then the question of what else might be existing in this ‘more than’ plane arises. Feminists have traditionally fought against a body/soul dichotomy which includes the idea of two dimensions that exist independently of each other.

One way to combat the conundrum of ‘more than’ clause could be to highlight the difference between independent and interdependent existence between matter and ‘more than’ matter. In asserting that the world as we know it is God’s body but God is more than the body, feminists of pantheistic conviction seek to affirm a strong link between the physical and whatever the ‘more than’ involves. The interdependency between the physical and the ‘more than’ is what forms the identity of God.

Another way to solve the conundrum is to appeal that the ‘more than’ of God is to be understood metaphorically rather than ontologically. Sallie McFague argues to that effect, in her book chapter ‘Ecofeminism and Nature’:

Both of these terms, *spirit* and *body*, are metaphors: both refer properly to ourselves and other creatures and entities in our experience of the world. Neither describes God, for both are *back*, not *face*, terms.³⁰³

McFague emphasises that a Spirit metaphor speaks of relationality rather than control, vitality of life rather than causality: “The connection is one of *relationship* at the deepest possible level, the level of life, rather than *control* at the level of ordering and directing nature.”³⁰⁴ If this is so, ontologically speaking, everything that exists, including God, does so in the dimension we know, and there is no room for another dimension or the dualism another (metaphysical dimension) would create.

A recent Scottish philosopher who has agonised over the difficulty in demarcating pantheism from theism and pantheism is Ryan Mullins. He argues that if the ‘more than’ cannot be defined, it ought to be dropped.³⁰⁵ However, Mullins works within the framework of analytical/Anglo-American philosophy. If we evoke Keller’s *theopoiesis* and Ricoeur’s work on metaphors, it is us who are adding ‘more than’ to God, and hence to ourselves, and

³⁰³ McFague, ‘Ecofeminism,’ 118 (emphasis original).

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 120 (emphasis original).

³⁰⁵ R. Mullins, ‘The Difficulty in Demarcating Pantheism’ *Sofia* (online at https://www.academia.edu/20717983/The_Difficulty_with_Demarcating_Pantheism :2016; accessed 30.09.19)

we do so legitimately. In other words, continental/post-modern philosophy dodges the ontological conundrum I have highlighted, leaving the tension it creates hanging.

3.2.3 'More Than' in Us

The tendency in feminist theological writings has been to deny life-after-death scenarios as they rob the current moment of its centrality in life experience. Feminist writers have noted how especially female roles have been restricted and devalued due to a 'higher' vision and goal beyond this life. As we have seen in chapter two, however, recently some new generation feminist theologians have questioned the denial of life-after-death scenarios in feminist thinking. A compromised position is offered by Pennington who insists that in death an individual truly ceases to exist ontologically, but will live again in the resurrection of bodies, in an embodied form. This, however, raises more questions than answers, in particular to do with the dimension of time. If the past is no longer, how can anything that has ceased to exist become *the same* again?

The difficulty here lies in the definition of what makes up a person and how to identify that person as being the same person that was in the past (who in the present no-longer exists). In contemporary philosophy, this difficulty has been addressed with various solutions. On one hand, there is a denial of the sameness of a person *in toto*. Fiona Meredith discusses the 'myth of universal self-hood' in her book chapter 'A Post-Metaphysical Approach.' She quotes Judith Butler, for whom "identity operates as an effect of discourse, a 'normative ideal rather than a descriptive feature of experience.'" ³⁰⁶ According to this view, a person is a constantly changing 'unit,' so much so it cannot really be identified as a unit. There then is no issue about 'sameness' of a person in life -after-death since sameness cannot be established even from one moment to the next in the here-and-now.

On another hand, there is a denial of change *in toto*. This solution comes from the philosophical time debates featuring McTaggart's A and B Theory of time. ³⁰⁷ According to McTaggart's B Theory of time, a person NOW is a 'time slice' of the whole person who in actual fact, ontologically speaking, exists in the past and future as well as in the present

³⁰⁶ F. Meredith, 'A Post-Metaphysical Approach' in *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion*, Critical Readings Series P. S. Anderson and B. Clack (eds.): (London: Routledge, 2004), 54-72; at 57, quoting J. Butler from *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 17.

³⁰⁷ J. E. McTaggart, 'Unreality of Time,' *Mind* 17 (1908), 457-74.

(simultaneously). The view of time so envisioned is called a block view of universe, or static time/four-dimensional eternalism.³⁰⁸ In such a view of time, change is an illusion created by human consciousness which travels through the four-dimensional (static) time landscape. Everything that exists has always existed and will always exist just so, down to the smallest of particles. If adopting this view of time, ontologically speaking all people who have ever lived still exist.

However interesting such philosophical speculation of time might be, it is not relevant to this thesis: feminists base their theology on life experience and life experience does not support the idea of past and future being on par with the present in any real way. Feminist theology is strongly presentist in its convictions about time and eschews hypothetical metaphysical theorising, such as is involved in McTaggart's time debates.³⁰⁹

A third solution lies in attempting to affirm the sameness of a person from cradle to the grave in spite of the physical and mental changes that occur over a lifetime. This is the question of identity, which is hard to pin down even though, superficially, it is common sense. In feminist circles, where presentism seems to be the preferred and insisted upon time concept, I wonder if something akin to God's dual nature in Process Thought could be affirmed of humans also: that we are our bodies but also 'more than': our identities are formed by something that does not change over the course of time. This has been traditionally expressed as humans consisting of body and soul (and/or spirit). The traditional formulation, however, is unpalatable to the feminist thinking since it places the 'more than' (soul/spirit) into another dimension and so introduces a schism within a person. The dualism this creates has been critiqued as patriarchal and even dangerous to human flourishing.

I propose a solution to the 'more-than' issue in human make-up by suggesting that the 'more than' is inherent in the world as we know it, not separate from it, and that historically it has been falsely assigned to another dimension. In death, bodies through the process of decay give up their energy into the environment and give up their previous relationality in favour of different, newly gained relationality to the environment. However, suppose there is an 'excess' energy that does not decay and is not transformed into another form of energy. I suggest that this 'excess' energy is 'more than' in human identity and that it acts like a bundle

³⁰⁸ Much has been written about the block view of universe; for some fairly recent discussion see for example D. Falk, 'A Debate over the Physics of Time,' *Quanta Magazine* (online at <https://www.quantamagazine.org/a-debate-over-the-physics-of-time-20160719/> : 2016; accessed 12.03.2020).

³⁰⁹ For a comprehensive account on current philosophical time debates see Nathan L. Oaklander's four volume *The Philosophy of Time* (London: Routledge, 2008).

of energy that does not decay but stays the same. The difference between this and the traditional model is that in this model, there is no other dimension where the ‘soul’/ ‘bundle of energy’ dwells i.e. no spiritual realm, but rather, what has been traditionally called ‘spiritual’ is in fact part of the energy of this world. Crucially, in this model, the ‘soul’/‘bundle of energy’ does not exist outwith the dimension of time but is held *within* time, and hence is as present as anything else we observe around us. I am offering this model of thinking as a solution to the conundrum in panentheism.³¹⁰ Having said that, as soon as everything that exists is ontologically deposited onto one dimension, the worldview that emerges is closer to pantheism than panentheism, unless God’s ‘core energy,’ although part of this world, is somehow separate from everything else that exists.

The model above affords a fresh formulation of the resurrection of the dead. The traditional Christian formulation of “whoever believes in me has eternal life” (John 6:47) receives added gravitas. The bundle of energy that I suggest forms our identity, through faith is brought into relation to the Divine. The Scripture talks about the impossibility of this relationality to be broken (‘neither through death nor any forces nor any agents,’ paraphrased, Romans 8:38-39). This would mean that although our bodies are given up into the environment in our death, the excess energy I describe as the ‘more than’ in human identity, continues in relationship to the Divine and hence is preserved from decay/disintegration. In the resurrection of the dead, the Divine initiates that the energy that is our core energy is re-formed back into the mould of the bodies we had, but with a difference (the energy becoming body rather than ‘having’ a body). Here I am relying on the witness of the Gospels, in the stories of Jesus’s appearances after Jesus’ resurrection: his resurrected being is able to appear out of no-where and move through matter with ease and yet is fully (materially) embodied at other times. Such matter has the ability to be instantly transformed back into invisible energy without a loss of identity. In other words, there is an added ease or fluidity between what appears to us as matter and the core energy of a person. Perhaps a helpful way to think of this is through the three modes of H₂O: the water that is in the air might be invisible but becomes visible when temperature cools down; with temperature dropping and then rising again, the same water molecules change their physical appearance, even though they stay the same in essence. Similarly, in the model I suggest that the core energy of a person, in the resurrected

³¹⁰ I am aware that this way of thinking is not novel as similar models of energy exist in Asian philosophies and religions e.g. ‘Qi’ life energy in Taoism.

life, may change into a definite form of a body and then back into (invisible) energy with ease.

Section Three: A Wheel Within A Wheel

3.3.1 Ezekiel's Vision

The quest of this thesis has been to trace the feminist critique of traditional Christian eschatology in order to survey what kind of understanding of time is suggested by feminist theologies. The aim has been to respond to the challenge of feminist values, taking the content of the feminist critique of traditional (patriarchal) theology seriously. Further, it has tried to seek a conceptual framework that could resonate with feminist writers/theologians and persons of feminist convictions who do not wish to discard the witness of the Scriptures and the traditional formulations on life-after-death, and the resurrection of the bodies in particular. In this final section of my thesis, I wish to bring a suggestion for a new model to image time. The purpose of the new metaphor is not to empty other concepts of their validity, but mainly, it is in an attempt to break free from the linear conception of time without losing a *telos* completely. The *telos* being that which has been ascribed in the earlier chapter to feminist theology: renewal of life.

The imagery of this model comes from the writings of prophet Ezekiel, from chapter one, where a vision of God is described. In the vision, someone resembling a human is sitting on a throne which is supported by a throne chariot with four wheels. Ezekiel 1: 16-20 describes these wheels:

¹⁶ The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the colour of a beryl: and they four had one likeness: and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel.¹⁷ When they went, they went upon their four sides: and they turned not when they went.¹⁸ As for their rings, they were so high that they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four.¹⁹ And when the living creatures went, the wheels went by them: and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up.²⁰ Whithersoever the spirit was

to go, they went, thither was their spirit to go; and the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels.³¹¹

In Jewish mysticism, the vision of Ezekiel's throne chariot became a symbol of God's presence and being in the world. It was named Shekinah, from a Hebrew verb which has the meaning 'to dwell.' Shekinah became to be understood as a female form of God, in particular in Jewish Kabbalah, one that believers were to call back from the exile to dwell among them once more.³¹² I am taking the picture of the wheel within a wheel as a way of looking at time, fully aware that there is no particular link neither in the Christian nor in the Jewish tradition to understand the wheel within a wheel this way. However, I note that the depiction of God's throne chariots does play a role in the kabbalistic eschatological thinking and that in the Jewish and in the Christian tradition Ezekiel's vision is understood to be a true depiction of God's likeness, and hence, perhaps, of the Divine essence.

In other traditions, such as Hinduism, the wheel is known as a symbol of time, as noted in chapter one of this thesis. However, in Ezekiel's vision the wheel has another wheel in it. This makes it possible for the wheel to change directions easily, and in fact, immediately. In the vision it is described how this changing of direction happens with the living (angelic) creatures who all share the same spirit: the wheel, the angelic beings and God's spirit seem all be linked together intrinsically. The wheel is said to be full of eyes. This makes me think of Queen Elizabeth I's gowns, some of which were decorated with eyes all around them. My understanding is that this signified the sovereign's claims to see everything that is happening in his/her realm (in other words, it is a depiction of royal omniscience).

The image of wheel within a wheel offers a way to think of time in a way that affirms certain key feminist values. Firstly, there is the circular motion that is akin to seasons and the repetition of life's everyday occurrences: the rhythmical and cyclical sense of time is retained. However, a wheel which is a freely moving does not imply a closed system of eternal returns and can signify that it bears relations to the dimensions beyond itself. In other words, a circle is a closed system, but a wheel that moves in a space can have a direction as well as the circular motion. Furthermore, the movement of the wheel within the wheel can be multidirectional: the trajectory does not have to be linear.

³¹¹ Here I use the King James Version as it includes the term 'wheel within a wheel' which is missing in most of the more recent translations e.g. the NIV.

³¹² L. Fine, 'Tikkun in Lurianic Kabbalah' (online at <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/tikkun-in-lurianic-kabbalah/>; accessed 20.11.19).

What I am suggesting here is that time may be imaged as having a cyclical dimension and also a direction. The direction is taken in connection with the Divine, and perhaps even negotiated with the Divine. This image would accord with the panentheistic view of God and process theology that many feminists utilise: God is ‘more than’ the sum of creation and the future is negotiable and co-created with the Divine. The idea that direction of the whole world might change at any point is also contained in this image. A pure linear, pre-destined and pre-arranged path is given up for an organic free movement with an intimate relation to the Divine.

3.3.2 The Breaking of the Wheel

While it might be satisfactory to leave my suggestion of the wheel within a wheel as described above, I wish to extend this imagery further to imagine a possible resolution of contradictions and a fundamental change in perception, which may perhaps not be agreeable to some feminist thinkers. It might seem more attractive to leave the imagery as it is as an ever-continuing wheel that always has been and always will be. However, I wish to accommodate a fundamental disruption to the scheme presented by accounting for a key aspect of Christian tradition, namely the resurrection of the dead. What I suggest is that at some point, there will be an interruption to the wheel within a wheel which symbolises time and the nature of our existence as it is now. In his first letter to the Corinthians, 15: 35-38, 42-44, Paul describes the change as follows:

³⁵ But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?” ³⁶ How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷ When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. ³⁸ But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body.....⁴² So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; ⁴³ it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴ it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.³¹³

The imagery Paul uses is that of a seed that looks and feels much different to the mature plant/animal that springs out from the seed, given the right conditions. I have earlier

³¹³ Here I use the NIV for its contemporary language that is easier to understand than the King James Version.

suggested that the dead at the same time cease to be as well as continue to be in a form of energy. This would mean something of the dead will remain and continue to exist, seed like. What I have not yet suggested is as what is to happen to this seed like energy.

In relation to my imagery of wheel within a wheel, I might further imagine that this wheel, at some point, ceases its motion, finds a resting place, and breaks open. If one bursts a balloon, what is left is the skin of the balloon that is flat.³¹⁴ It is something similar I suggest: the material of the wheel within a wheel is still there but forms a ground from which new life can spring up. I suggest the ‘material’ of the wheel which in this picture would be the whole of cosmos and the whole history becomes a fertile ground to something new and more stable. Perhaps this would mean that time ceases to move – not ceasing to be but ceases to move – which I could only imagine as entities not being lost into the past but everything that exists continuing to exist as they are, not without movement and change in the small scale but without being lost into nothingness and into ‘not-being.’

Conclusion

In this final chapter, I have utilised the strength of the third wave feminism in bringing post-structural and post-modern breezes to bear on the discussion of this thesis. Catherine Keller questions the duality of light/darkness, order/chaos, good/evil as she seeks to reconcile the Western psyche with the uncertainties of life in its array of shades. This includes the idea of having no beginning or ending and no particular *telos*. However, in the broader discussion, at least in the process-relational feminist theology, a direction is prescribed to whole of creation, that of renewal of life. The shape and imagery of time that process-relational feminist theology seems to embrace is that of an ever-increasing cycle or spiral that combines progress with the cyclical movement. In my suggestion however, I wish to steer away from progress thinking, in line with Keller, and seek an alternative. I contend with the cyclical in the metaphor of wheel within a wheel and a direction which however is not linear but organic and negotiable. I wish also to suggest that time as an aspect of life as we know it will not always stay the same but will/might undergo change. In all this, I have sought to combine

³¹⁴ Bursting a balloon might seem unpalatable metaphor to adopt, however, in the eschatological imagery of the Scriptures something equally drastic and ‘explosive’ is described: the sky will be rolled up like a papyrus scroll, stars are shifted from their places, mountains melt and the continents shift. See e.g. Isaiah 34:4, Micah 1:4 and Revelations 6:14.

imageries and stories from the Scriptures with feminist values in a way that might offer a middle ground between traditional eschatology and radical feminist critique.

Conclusion

In feminist theologies, women's experience takes epistemological primacy in understanding the world and the Divine. Based on women's experiences, the traditional and patriarchal vision of the future of the world has been deemed as life-restricting and even dangerous. In the introduction, I mentioned a recent case in the United States in which parents resolved to drastic action regarding the education of their children due to a vision of a future that includes the Darbynian rapture. Whilst only a singular case, many more could be cited from this generation and prior where families and groups of believers have radically re-orientated their lives according to the expected sudden return of Christ or another end-of-the-world belief. I used this case to show an example in what ways a belief about the future affects the present; this is true not only in the 'scandal' cases but also in the ordinary every-day living. This is why it is important to carefully think about how our conception of the future is influencing our living together, and this is precisely what feminist theologians have done.

These ruminations brought me to consider the nature of the future and the concept of time, in reference to teleology. As a newly out-of-the-closet feminist, I have been struggling with the tension that is created by the radical feminist critique of Christian theology and my own faith commitment to Jesus of Nazareth. An easy way out of the tension is no-where to be seen in the immediate horizon; this thesis has been a path to contemplate and work on the controversies created by the merging of the two.

A glaring difference between my previously held convictions and what I have since come to accept as a more accurate portrayal of reality, lies in the interpretation of the Scriptures. During this journey, my awe and respect for the Scriptures has not lessened but increased, yet I have had to carefully consider on what ground I base my (evolving) theology.

Linda Woodhead and others have critiqued the epistemological basis of feminist theology as insufficiently theological due to the vagueness of the term 'women's experience.' In the analytical tradition, it is indeed difficult to formulate a definition for women's experience that could be considered sufficiently 'solid' to act as a premise, *sine qua non*. On one hand, 'experience' is a common sense perception and can be understood easily; on another, trying to explain and pin down the term, is surprisingly difficult. This reminds me of the famous quote from Augustine regarding time: "What then is time? If no one asks me, I know what it

is. If I wish to explain it to him who asks, I do not know.”³¹⁵ It further reminds me of research into quantum physics that indicates that observation alone changes the reality of the particles and hence, we potentially cannot know things as they truly are (since our observation interrupts the ‘natural’ state).³¹⁶ Instead of resolving this tension between the object of knowing and the subject of knowing, I suggest to leave the tension unresolved and admit that both, the common sense understanding and the impossibility of pinning down analytically, are present when talking about women’s experience as an epistemological grounding for theology.

To that tension, I wish to birth another concept that lays the ground for my own developing epistemology. Rather than saying that women’s experience is the epistemological foundation on which feminist theology is/ought to be built upon, I suggest that our knowing is not self-orientated such as ‘experience’ might suggest, but relational. I understand my theology to be based on relationships, just as any knowing in this world is ultimately and fundamentally based on relationships. While it might be said that relationships themselves fall within the category of experience, I would wish to retain a difference in the sense that a relationship requires a living Other whereas experience does not so necessarily.³¹⁷

To specify, a case study. It was through my relationship to my supervisor, Prof Heather Walton, that I was introduced to feminist literature. Her relationship to the authors was brought close to me which put me into a relationship to those authors via their written work. With ‘relationship’ I mean influence that sparks change from one to another and note here that a relationship in this sense is not necessarily always mutual, as it may also happen over distance e.g. via published media.

This has theological significance when put in the context of our knowing of the Divine. I would say, the most basic of relationships all humans have is to the Divine, just as all humans are conceived in and born out of a relationship to parent/s. The relationship then is primordial to the concept of Divine and the language and understanding of the Divine. As our relationship changes and as we change through the relationship (and perhaps as the process

³¹⁵ Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, *Confessions* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 244.

³¹⁶ E.g. Weizmann Institute Of Science, ‘Quantum Theory Demonstrated: Observation Affects Reality’ ScienceDaily (online at www.sciencedaily.com/releases/1998/02/980227055013.htm : 1998; accessed 07.10.19).

³¹⁷ Although I wish to understand ‘relationship’ here in its widest sense, my statement that ‘all knowing is based on relationships’ refers to psychoanalytical and linguistic theories that imply that without a relationship/s our thinking and language would not form in such a way as would warrant knowledge. To know that we know something, the knowledge of our knowing alone, will require a basic thinking and linguistic concepts.

theologians would add, as the Divine changes), our knowing changes. For me then, it is not the text of the Divine (which I regard the Scriptures to be) that forms my relationship with the Divine, but my relationship with the Divine that influences my reading of the text.

To further extend on the alleged difference between relationship and experience, unfortunately, will not fit the aim of this conclusion and must be reserved for another occasion. The overall conclusion from which I do not wish to swerve from, lies in the methodology rather than the content: I am inviting the reader to consider time not in binary categories of either/or but to allow different approaches to exist side by side. I salute the tension between the analytical in the Anglo-American tradition and the 'intuitive' in the Continental,³¹⁸ and I wish to allow that tension to stay unresolved and perhaps even, attempt to further push it out to the unknown waters.

This move itself mirrors the 'spirit' of feminist theologies which is not afraid to agree to disagree without giving up close contact and openness to further debate.³¹⁹ Mine is a small contribution towards feminist eschatology that is still in the making.

³¹⁸ Here I am linking feminist theologies to continental philosophy which is not simplistically speaking proper: although many feminists have used continental philosophy as a tool to shape their argument, other feminist theologians feel more home at Anglo-American tradition. See e.g. *Feminist Philosophy of Religion*, P. A. Anderson and B. Clark (eds.) (London: Routledge, 2004) in general, chapter three E. T. Armour 'A Post-structuralist Approach', p. 42 in particular: "A number of feminists trained in analytic philosophy of religion have offered astute criticisms of traditional philosophy of religion...and have turned to Continental philosophy to address those weaknesses. They see in Continental philosophy...a route that offers access to resources that can address the lacunae they find in traditional philosophy of religion."

³¹⁹ "For feminist theologies, democracy means that controversy will remain at the heart of what we do and that it will fuel us to greater engagement with a world in need of our passion. Our ability to live with disunity is our greatest strength and our greatest question remains how to have the disputes, not whether to have them," Althaus-Reid and Isherwood, *Controversies*, 2

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