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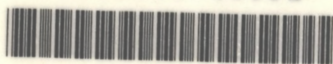

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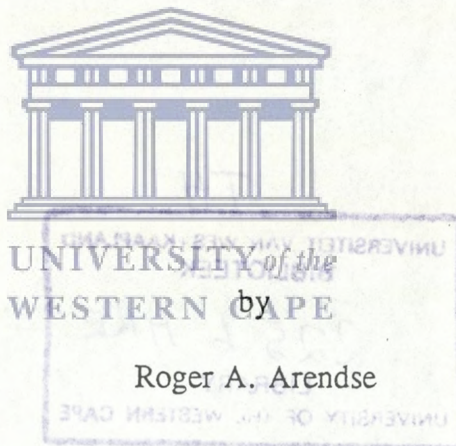
THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND NEW TESTAMENT INTERPRETATION:

The Significance of the Cultural Anthropology of Mary Douglas and Bruce Malina for New Testament Interpretation



by

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SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF THEOLOGY

TO WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, HOLLAND, MICHIGAN, USA.

July, 1991

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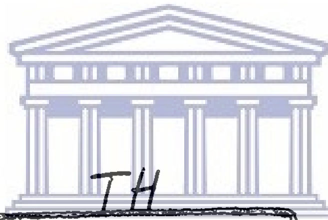

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PREFACE

This thesis represents one further step along the way in my 'pilgrimage of exploration' in the field of NT interpretation. Over the last ten years or so, I have attempted to discover methods for the study of the NT writings that could be more critical, creative and liberatory. While this is not the place to trace the many other steps taken in the past, it is obvious that the present work develops out of earlier discoveries which I have made.

My specific interest in social science approaches to the study of the NT writings really grows out of post-graduate studies in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Cape Town in my home country of South Africa. During the course of biblical studies at this institute, sociological methods became generally more formative on my thinking about social science approaches to the NT writings. In this thesis, however, I attempt to explore and evaluate cultural anthropological methods and models of NT interpretation, especially as these have developed among certain NT scholars in North America.

This thesis is one result of an enriching academic year spent in the Th.M program at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan. I need to thank the faculty and staff at Western, and churches in the community, especially Hope Reformed church. Without their financial support and assistance for my family and I during our time in Holland, this year of study would not have been possible.

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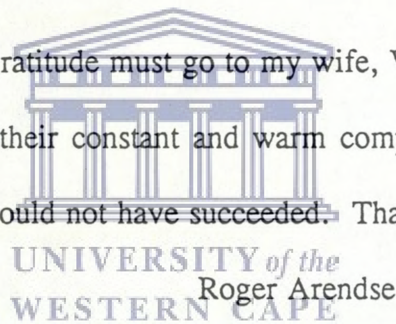
It is impossible to single out the many individuals who contributed to the success of this year. I mention only a few. My thanks go to special friends, Jane and Larry Dickie who first mentioned the possibility, and then moved to create the opportunity for my family and I to come to Holland. I thank Dr Charles Wanamaker (Chuck to his friends) at the University of Cape Town for first encouraging me to pursue social science studies of the NT writings. To Dr George Hunsberger for setting up such a stimulating Th.M program at Western, and Dr James Brownson for acting as patient and insightful advisor of this thesis, go special thanks. I must also thank Dr Robert Schreiter at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago for his willingness to act as second reader of the thesis, and for making time during his busy schedule to provide helpful comments where needed.

Finally, my deepest gratitude must go to my wife, Wendy and my two children, Grant and Taryn. Without their constant and warm companionship, love and patient support during this year, I would not have succeeded. Thank you very much!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INTRODUCTION

> The Bible, a treasure of all Christian churches, contains the irreplaceable primary documents of the Christian faith. The Bible is also a collection of ancient documents, written in strange and even exotic languages of other ages and cultures. Much in the Bible is foreign to urbanized Western civilization and requires exploration. The Bible is also the major source of information about the history of Israel in pre-Christian times and the origins of the Christian faith and the Christian Church. Under all these aspects the Bible has been the source of information and doctrine, of faith and hope. Its interpretation has also been a battleground, for men's (*sic.*) hopes and most deeply held convictions are buttressed from the Bible, differences as to what the Bible says or how to read it provoke violent debate (Krentz 1975:1).

Thesis Focus And Rationale

We share the view that the Bible has remained both "a treasure" and "a battleground" in the history of the Christian Church. We also acknowledge the fact that what the Bible means or how it is read continues to provoke often "violent debate". One (and by no means the only) important reason for this debate is directly implied in the opening quotation. It is precisely the different ways in which readers of the Bible in contemporary socio-cultural settings have responded to the problem of *continuity* and *distance* which exists between themselves on the one hand, and the Bible as "a collection of ancient documents, written in strange and even exotic languages of other ages and cultures" on the other.

Through the course of time, a number of critical methods of biblical interpretation have been developed. These have all claimed in one way or another to deal with the hermeneutical problem of continuity and distance described above. It is beyond the scope

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of this thesis to present a detailed analysis of each one of these methods as they have been applied to the whole of the Bible.

Instead, our primary interest in this thesis is to explore in greater detail how contemporary *social science methods* have proposed to interpret the NT writings in the context of their social world. One particular concern of ours is to appreciate and evaluate how useful the social science tradition of interpretation is for addressing the hermeneutical problem of continuity and distance. We are also keen to discover what are some specific ways in which social science methods help us to understand and explain the nature of Christian origins and the meaning NT theology.

In the first part of our thesis, we describe some important, if general features of the social-scientific study of the NT, especially as this study has appropriated the theories and models of sociology and anthropology. Yet, even such general descriptions will take us too far afield and prevent us from appreciating and evaluating the challenges and impact of *particular* social science methods in NT studies.

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Consequently, we limit our exploration to one kind of social science method, viz., that one which appropriates the insights of *cultural anthropology* for the study of the NT writings within the context of their social world. To give even greater depth to our exploration we shall endeavor to expound the work of the North American NT scholar, Bruce Malina.

Malina is a leading representative of an emerging social science tradition of NT interpretation, mainly as it is developing in the West. He believes that, among other critical methods of NT interpretation, a cultural anthropological hermeneutic makes

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possible (for North American readers particularly) a more accurate and creative, and less ethnocentric reading of these writings.

In his project of NT interpretation, Malina has been strongly indebted to the work of another leading scholar, Mary Douglas. Douglas is a British social (cultural) anthropologist who shares in the tradition of such eminent scholars as Bronislaw Malinowski, Evans-Pritchard and Edward Leach. Like that of her predecessors, Douglas' studies of many different cultures (primitive and modern) have been strongly empirical and vitally concerned with questions of social order. In other words, she has focussed on the ways in which groups and individuals create and use a variety of cultural symbols and rituals for the purpose of imposing and maintaining order in and giving meaning to their different social worlds. Over many years of intensive fieldwork and research, Douglas has developed important theoretical constructs and models to facilitate and enhance the task of cross-cultural analysis. These constructs and models have all been widely acclaimed within a variety of social-scientific and humanistic disciplines (Wuthnow *et.al.* 1984:11).

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The importance of Douglas' work for the specific study of the NT will become clearer in the discussion which follows this introduction. At this stage we mention only the fact that many of her cultural insights and models have proven themselves to be valuable heuristic devices for such NT scholars as Malina. Just how valuable Douglas' insights and models are for NT studies, and how significant Malina's cultural hermeneutic is for understanding and explaining particular aspects of the NT writings and their social world remain other significant concerns of this thesis.

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Outline Of Thesis

The thesis is divided into **four** main parts. **Part 1** provides a brief historical context within which to appreciate our later exploration of Bruce Malina's cultural anthropological approach to the NT writings. In this section, we critically and briefly survey three important methods of NT interpretation which have emerged in the wake of the Enlightenment. These are the methods of historical criticism, neo-orthodoxy (theological criticism) and social scientific criticism. The last mentioned method provides the most immediate context for understanding Malina's cultural anthropological approach to the NT writings. The first two represent the methods to which all social science methods claim to be both a critical response to and a development beyond.

Part 2 attempts a descriptive analysis of the cultural anthropology of Mary Douglas. In particular, we focus in some detail on two important theoretical constructs in Douglas' work which have become extremely valuable for NT scholars such as Bruce Malina. The first of these is Douglas' understanding of purity and pollution systems and their function in society. The second is her group-grid categorical scheme and its significance as a model for cross-cultural analysis.

Part 3 explores the cultural hermeneutic of Bruce Malina in his study of the NT writings within the context of their social world. We are mainly concerned with how Malina has utilized and/or adapted the theoretical insights and models of Douglas in his NT studies, and in the fruit his studies have produced.

Part 4 attempts a critical appraisal of social science methods and their explanatory value and utility for NT studies. In particular, we evaluate the work of both Douglas and . . .

(See p.5 after p.6)

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PART ONE

METHOD IN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION: A CRITICAL SURVEY

1.1. Introductory

As students of the Bible, we have wished at one time or another that we could simply bypass the discussion of *method* and plunge directly into an understanding of the Bible itself. We have grown impatient when confronted by a wealth of methods for biblical interpretation. Such impatience is understandable, but it must inevitably accept the reality of the matter. Norman Gottwald expresses this reality well in a prolegomena to his study of the Hebrew Bible:

> It is easy to be impatient with discussions of method. We want to get on to the 'content' and the 'meaning' of the Bible, often forgetful of the fact that we have no access to the content and meaning of the Bible apart from *some* method of study. All interpreters come to the text with assumptions, dispositions, and tools of analysis that lead them to single out aspects of the text and to arrange, emphasize, and interpret those aspects in meaningful patterns. Only by an awareness of method, as actually applied to the text, will we be able to see concretely why biblical interpreters have differed in their conclusions and to give confident account of the basis and justification for our own methods (1985:8).

Gottwald's observation is of course accepted today by any scholar who possesses a *critical* orientation to the Bible. This kind of orientation drew its lifeblood from the period of history we commonly refer to as 'the Enlightenment' (*die Aufklärung*). The banner under which the critical study of the Bible emerged was that of 'scientific inquiry'. Again, Gottwald is helpful in describing the nature of this orientation which had come to govern *all* areas of inquiry, not only that of biblical studies:

(p.7 after p.5)

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Malina in light of our discussions in the first three parts of the thesis. In this section we assess critically the respective studies of Douglas and Malina in terms of three important questions. The first two questions ask whether or not the cultural anthropological approaches of these two scholars are either reductionistic and/or ideologically captive to the ideas and values of Western culture and scholarship. The final question focusses more directly on the cultural hermeneutic of Malina in terms of whether or not it presents either an 'advance' or a 'paradigm shift' in NT interpretation.

Conclusion

It is our contention that the theoretical insights and cross-cultural models of Mary Douglas appear to provide valuable heuristic tools for the critical and creative appreciation of the NT writings within the context of their social world. We suggest that this is strongly evident in the NT studies of Bruce Malina. He demonstrates how Douglas' cultural anthropological insights and models may provide one indispensable key for unlocking the meaning of the NT writings within their earliest socio-cultural context.

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Although our thesis does not claim to be either definitive or comprehensive in scope, it is hoped that our exploratory work will provide a better and more critical understanding of the explanatory value, utility and limitations of social science approaches for present and future NT studies.

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> 'Scientific' is here intended in the broad sense of a systematic method of study necessary for the intelligible analysis and explanation of any subject matter. Science, in relation to biblical studies, includes not only natural, social, and psychological sciences, but also efforts at greater precision of method in the humanities, as in the study of language, literature, and history, and in the exercise of philosophy as a kind of overarching reflection on scientific methods and results as they relate to other kinds of knowledge (1985:7).

In this first part of our thesis we attempt a brief, but critical survey of just three significant methods of biblical interpretation which have come to reflect a 'scientific' ethos. These include (i) the historical-critical method, (ii) the neo-orthodox (or theological) method, and (iii) the social science method.[1]

1.2. <u>The Historical-Critical Method</u>

1.2.1. <u>Emergence</u>

At least some form of the historical-critical investigation of the Bible is accepted today by all serious biblical scholars. There is no possibility of returning biblical study to the confines of a pre-critical discipline. But this was not always the status of historical criticism. In fact, in terms of its direct application to the Bible, the historical-critical method was a comparative latecomer.[2] Its own rise to prominence provides an interesting history in itself. Only a faint outline of this history will be presented in this study.

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[1]In our survey in Part 1, we do not cover the new literary method. Instead, we use insights from this method to critique the social science method, especially as it is used by Bruce Malina; cf.4.2.2. Also, while we use the singular form of 'method' to designate a particular school of interpretation, we are aware that often a plurality of methods are embraced by any one school. This point will be become clear in our discussion.

[2]Some of forms of the historical-critical method include textual criticism, form criticism and redaction criticism (cf.Krentz 1975: 48-54; Nations 1983:63.

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In his useful study, *The Historical-Critical Method* (1975), Edgar Krentz recognizes those "incidental but clear historical insights" present in the understanding of the Bible as early as the patristic period (1975:6-7). But he rightly designates this as the period of *dogmatic* rather than historical criticism of the Bible. The dogmatic school of biblical interpretation developed in the tradition of such church leaders as Ambrose, Hilary and Augustine, and its principal design was to the serve Church (dogma) rather than historical interests. Yet the *historical* concerns of Marcion, Origen, Dionysius of Alexandria and Jerome were taken up and developed in the later periods of Medieval Scholasticism, the Renaissance and the Reformation.

During the Renaissance, for example, historical concerns were in vogue in the studies of Greek, Roman, and other ancient writings, among them documents of the Church (Gottwald 1985:10; Krentz 1975:7-8). Humanist scholars such as Desiderius Erasmus, Cardinal Cajetan and John Colet ensured that "historical thought and the use of reason were legacies to the Reformation and later interpreters" (Krentz 1975:8; cf. Kümmel 1972:20-29).[3]

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Krentz demonstrates that it was "the rise of methodical doubt" in the 17th century, particularly through the disciplines of science, history and philosophy, which resulted in "a new method of achieving knowledge". This "new method" impacted strongly on

[3]Gottwald observes that "the Protestant Reformation by asserting the historical and theological superiority of the Bible over the church, indirectly encouraged the application of the secular historical-critical method to the biblical text" (1985:10).

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biblical interpretation (1975:10-11). Just how great the impact was is captured in the succinct comment of Krentz:

> At the beginning of the seventeenth century the Bible was the universal authority in all fields of knowledge, but by the end of the century that authority was eroded (1975:11).

However, the full measure of historical-critical inquiry was unleashed on the biblical texts only during the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment periods of the 18th and 19th centuries respectively (Gottwald 1985:10). What was traditionally accepted in the Bible as virtually unquestionable in terms of both content and form and as an authoritative record of the past, was now severely questioned on the basis of its historical formation. Although it stood in the familiar tradition of classical orthodoxy and the Reformation, the Enlightenment asserted the primacy of *reason* over revelation (faith). Reason began virtually to shape and determine the character of biblical doctrine (Krentz 1975:17). In this way the early 18th century phase of the Enlightenment ensured that historical criticism would intensify its influence and increasingly make its way into the church (Krentz 1975:18-22).

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H.S. Reimarus's *Fragmente eines Ungenannten* (1774-1778) is a significant example of how historical inquiry began to mould theological outlook on the New Testament and the early church.[4] In particular, Reimarus addressed the problem of the historical Jesus. Utilizing doubt and rationalist presuppositions as the essential tools in

---

[4]The study of Reimarus was published in 7 sections (*fragments*) over this period by G.E. Lessing, the Wolfenbuttel librarian. Lessing ensured the anonymity of Reimarus, and it was only in 1813 that the identity of Reimarus was made known by his son (Kümmel 1972:90).

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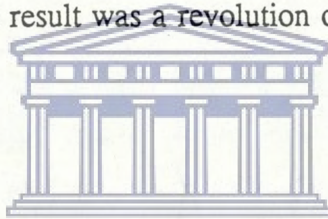
his historical (non-theological) study, he raised to the foreground some critical issues in NT scholarship which still remain important today (Krentz 1975:20-21; Kümmel 1972:89-93).[5]

It took the "intellectual and social revolution" of the 19th century to propel the historical criticism of the Bible to free and undisputed prominence. The development of the historical method during this period is an important and interesting one to trace.[6] Again, Krentz provides a fitting summary of the impact which the 19th century had on biblical interpretation:

> It is difficult to overestimate the significance the nineteenth century has for biblical interpretation. It made historical criticism *the* approved method of interpretation. The result was a revolution of viewpoint in evaluating the Bible" (1975:30).



1.2.2. Method

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As a method for the study of the Bible, historical criticism was designed to have a positive orientation. It was "to illuminate the past, to understand the events, and to interpret them" (Krentz 1975:35-36).[7] By self-designation, this method is both historical

---

[5]Some of the critical issues raised by Reimarus included Jesus as eschatological preacher, the messianic secret, the passion predictions, the surprise of the disciples at the resurrection, and miracles (Krentz (1975:20-21).

[6]From Georg Niebuhr's influential *Romische Geschichte* (1811-1812); through Friedrich Schleiermacher's *Hermeneutik* (1838), David Friedrich Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu* (1835) and Ferdinand Christian Baur's *Tendenzkritik*; to Frans Overbeck's crucial historical investigation of the Bible, *Uber die Christlichkeit unserer heutigen Theologie* (1871), and Albert Schweitzer's pioneering work, subtitled *Geschichte der Leben Jesu-Forchung* (1906); (cf.Bowman 1949:184-193; Neill 1964:12-32; Krentz 1975:22-28; Kümmel 1972:116-143, 199-205, 235-244.

[7]Cf. Krentz 1975:37, n.13

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and critical. It is *historical* in that it is designed to systematically explain the past, to discover why it happened, and then to write a narrative history of what happened. It is *critical* because it insists that primary source documents of any kind must not be accepted at face value. Rather the historical method demands of its practitioners that these documents be subjected to 'scientific' testing as to their plausibility, veracity, and value in light of themselves and the evidence of other available data (cf.Krentz 1975:35, 45-47).

In his seminal essay, *Über historische und dogmatishe Methode in der Theologie* ("On Historical and Dogmatic Method in Theology"), first published in 1898, Ernst Troeltsch formulated three principles or criteria which undergirded historical criticism in the 19th century (cf.Krentz 1975:55-56; Oakman 1986:230-232). (i) *Criticism* (or methodical doubt) implied that because history, at best, only achieves probability, religious faith must also be subjected to criticism. (ii) *Analogy* makes criticism possible by not only implying that all events are in principle similar, but also by making present experiences and events the criteria of probabilities in the past. (iii) *Correlation* posits the chain of cause and effect which undergirds the entire process of historical explanation. Because all historical phenomena are perceived as interrelated, change in one phenomenon necessarily brings a change in the causes leading to this phenomenon and in the effects it has other phenomena. By this principle, God's intervention in the historical process is seen as incompatible with the historical worldview and the possibility of miracle or salvation history is eliminated.

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We delineate just some effects of the historical-critical study of the Bible. In the process of biblical investigation, certain documents which were seen to have helped in shaping the biblical material or its later interpretations, were often seen to be "spurious and inaccurate in whole or part" (Richardson and Bowden eds. 1983:255). Consequently, there developed a stronger "self-conscious and sophisticated approach to these [biblical] sources, which had as its aim the recovery of the past, as it actually happened...i.e. in distinction from the way it was reported in the sources" (Richardson and Bowden eds. 1983:255). The biblical texts were subjected to 'a critical suspicion' like any other literary document. The goal of the historical method was to 'get behind' the texts in their present form, to what was believed to be the true meaning that these texts originally sought to transmit. Practitioners of the historical-critical method focussed essentially on the author of a particular text, the original readers /audience of the text and the historical location of the readers /audience to which the text was first addressed. Each of these factors were assumed to be indispensable for explaining the meaning of the text itself.[8]

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In short, then, the overall purpose of the historical-critical method was that the biblical sources should receive 'objective' interpretation within the historical context in which they were given birth (Richardson and Bowden eds. 1983:326; Krentz 1975:35-48). To this end a variety of 'modernist' critical tools, so characteristic of the

[8]The assumption of what is historically "indispensable" is shared by practitioners of the social science method (cf.1.4.1.). But, as we shall see, these practitioners include *social* structures, processes and forces among those factors which are considered "indispensable". Both biblical theological critics and new literary critics both reject this perspective in the form that it is expressed here. Cf.1.3 and 4.2.1.

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Enlightenment, were employed in the process of historical criticism. Among these tools were history, archaeology, philology, psychology, anthropology, philosophy and culture.

The question we need to ask, however, is whether or not the historical-critical method, as utilized by its 18th and 19th century practitioners, was able to deliver the 'objective' and 'value-neutral' historical reconstructions of biblical texts as they proposed that it could.

1.2.3. Appraisal

As a 'scientific' reading of the Bible, the historical-critical method made a significant contribution, the effects of which are felt to the present day (cf.Krentz 1975:63-67). It made the text itself the *object* of critical inquiry, and sought to overcome what was perceived to be the limits of biblical study which dominated up to then, chiefly that kind reflected in the confessional-ecclesiastical and narrowly cultural-ideological approaches to the Bible. Practitioners of the historical-critical method attempted to raise and address those questions of the modern age, so long ignored or neglected by most other biblical approaches. They attested to the fact of the time-conditioned historical character of the Bible.

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A primary concern of the historical-critical method, therefore, was to place *distance* between the biblical text and the interpreter(s) of the text, between the world of the text and the world of the exegete of the text, and between the worldview of the text and that of the believer in the modern age (Fiorenza 1984:129). The importance of *distance* inherent to the historical-critical method is aptly captured by Schüssler-Fiorenza:

> This 'distancing' effect is part of a 'historical consciousness' that allows the community of faith 'to disengage itself' from its past as well as from

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its present sociocultural embeddedness and biases (1984: 129-130; cf.Krentz 1975:61-62).

In order to attain such goals as those just mentioned, the historical-critical method has provided many invaluable research tools which undergird much of contemporary biblical and theological scholarship. We summarize some important functions of historical criticism as they are described by Schüssler-Fiorenza (1984:130-131; cf.Rowley 1947:4): (i) It asserts the meaning of the original witness over later dogmatic and social usurpations, for different purposes. (ii) It makes difficult the assimilation of the text to our own experience of parochial pietism and church interests. (iii) It keeps alive the 'irritation' of the original text by challenging our own assumptions, worldviews, and practices. (iv) It limits the number of interpretations that can be given to a text. The 'spiritual' meanings of a biblical text are limited by its literal historical meanings.

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Of course, Schüssler Fiorenza should not be seen as exhaustive in her summary of the positive attributes of historical criticism. Earlier, we alluded to some other strengths of this method and to these some more may be added. Yet, despite the significant "theological corrective" which the historical-critical method provides over other 'pre-critical' methods (Fiorenza 1984: 130), it also possesses some major limitations. Scholars such as Walter Wink spoke strongly of the "bankruptcy" of the

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historical method (1973:1)[9] and of the urgent need for "a new paradigm for biblical study".[10]

Only some limitations of the historical-critical method are mentioned now, while some others will be highlighted later.

Firstly, the historical perspective on the Bible was too atomistic. It failed to appreciate the Bible as a literary whole, with a coherency that provided a framework for understanding its own message (cf.Rowley 1947:4-5,10). For one thing, the often exaggerated stress on the pre-literary history of the biblical texts (diversity) tended to ignore also their 'post history' (unity).

Secondly, historical criticism succumbed to the danger of a "boundless relativism" (Krentz 1975:74). It tended to make religious faith captive to historical events as these events were interpreted within the limited framework of a cause-effect relationship of the 'modern' day historian . Faith appeared to be sacrificed on the altar of history, and the uniqueness of Christianity was severely undermined for it could now only be understood in relation to the whole of history (cf.Krentz 1975: 55-56). Inevitably, the central problem of the relation of faith to history was thrust to the foreground (cf.Krentz 1975:16; Nations 1983:59).

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Thirdly, practitioners of the historical-critical method may have striven for 'objectivity' and 'neutral-value' judgments in their interpretation of the Bible. But in

[9]Later practitioners of the historical-critical method have attempted to overcome some of the more blatant limitations of the method, especially the form it took in the earlier decades. Cf.Krentz 1975:75-87; Stuhlmacher (1977).

[10] We return to the whole question of a 'paradigm shift' in biblical studies in Part 4.

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reality they were also heavily influenced, more than they realized, by the preconceived ideas and values of Enlightenment thinking and belief (Rowley 1947:4-5). Stated another way, the historical method is, indeed, "the child of the Enlightenment" (Krentz 1975:55).[11] Consequently, the 'objectivity' of historical criticism was really the "ideology of objectivism" (Herzog 1974:392).

In recent times, theologies of liberation have sharply criticized what they recognize to be the *ideological captivity* of practitioners of historical criticism to the worldview, cultural values, class interests, and socio-economic agendas of mainstream Western society (cf.Bonino 1975; Assman 1976; Segundo 1976). Herzog reminds us that some important questions remained unaddressed by the historical-critical school of interpretation. For example, he asks:

> At whose bidding is the science of history done? What if the science of history were largely a tool of the affluent, partly aiding their conquest and control of the world? (1974:391).[12]

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For liberation theologians, the *poor* and their *situation of oppression* take center stage in the process of theological reflection. This necessitates a 'hermeneutics of

[11]For example, we see evidence of this (i) in the evolutionary theory of Darwinism which underlined the modernist stress on 'progress' and came to undergird many interpretations of the Bible, and (ii) in the Western scientific worldview which distrusted any notion of the supernatural in the biblical tradition. Cf. Troeltsch's third principle of historical criticism.

[12]It is important to see that liberation theologians make particular use of the tools provided by the social sciences, though in a different way to those NT theologians such as Bruce Malina assessed more directly in this thesis. Cf. Brown 1978:64-67, and Part 3.

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suspicion' with regard to all Western interpretations of the Bible, especially those interpretations which stem from the historical-critical method (cf.Mckim 1985:127-138).[13]

Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza who subscribes to the positive elements of historical criticism, also recognizes its limitations as a method for the project of liberation, especially the liberation of women (cf.1983:3-95; 1984). She believes that a critical feminist hermeneutic lays bare the false nature of the "'objective' textual interpretation and value-neutral historical reconstructions" in biblical studies (Fiorenza 1983: 30; cf.Payer 1977:25-48). Schüssler Fiorenza is among the many feminist theologians who further argue that much of historical criticism remains unappreciative of and unable to respond to certain issues of critical importance in biblical interpretation. Key among such issues is the fact that the Bible and all early Christian texts "are formulated in an androcentric language and conditioned by their patriarchal milieux and histories" (Fiorenza 1983:30; cf.Trible 1978; Fiorenza 1981; 1984; Ruether 1983; Tolbert 1983).

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To this point, our critical assessment of the historical approach to the Bible has highlighted mainly those views from contemporary theology. However, at the turn of the 20th century, Albert Schweitzer delivered one of the earliest and most incisive frontal attacks on the historical interpretation of the Bible in his famous *Geschichte der Leben Jesu-Fortung* ("The Quest for the Historical Jesus"). In particular, Schweitzer argued that the practitioners of the historical-critical method had failed in their attempt to reconstruct 'the historical Jesus'. All they had produced was their "own half-historical, half-modern

[13]In other words, an "ideological suspicion" has naturally led to a "hermeneutical suspicion" among proponents of liberation theology with regard to the historical critical approach to the Bible (Brown 1978:80-81; cf.26-27).

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Jesus" (1968:398). Instead of becoming the popular and intelligible figure of the modern age, the historical Jesus remained both "a stranger and an enigma"- at best a "Jesus who was too small" and at worst, "a Jesus [who] never existed" (Schweitzer 1968:399-400). The historical-critical method might have succeeded in part in reconciling the present with the past, and even transforming the present into the past. But Schweitzer believed it could not "make the present" or "call spiritual life into existence" (Schweitzer 1968:399). One classic example of Schweitzer's appraisal of the historical approach is worth mentioning:

> The study of the life of Jesus has had a curious history. It set out in quest of the historical Jesus, believing that when it found Him it could bring Him straight into our times as a Teacher and Saviour. It loosed the bands by which He had been riveted for centuries to the stony rocks of ecclesiastical doctrine, and rejoiced to see life and movement coming into the figure once more, the historical Jesus advancing, as it seemed, to meet it. But He does not stay; He passes by our time and returns to His own. What surprised and dismayed the theology of the last forty years was that, despite all forced and arbitrary interpretations, it could not keep Him in our time, but had to let Him go. He returned to His own time, not owing to the application of any historical ingenuity, but by the same inevitable necessity by which the liberated pendulum returns to its original position (1968:399).

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Schweitzer's *consistent eschatology* drew attention to the dangers and limitations of the historical-critical method. It also left serious questions about both the more precise role of the historical method in biblical interpretation and the fuller meaning of 'historic' Christianity.[14] Indeed, Schweitzer had now blazed the trail for *dialectical theology* and the *neo-orthodox* approach to the Bible, both of which are virtually synonymous with the name and work of Karl Barth.

[14]We address this latter issue in our discussion of the social science method. Cf.1.3.

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1.3. The Neo-Orthodox Method

1.3.1. Emergence

Karl Barth's renowned 'epistemological break' with mainline liberal theology in the 20th century also designated the shift in critical thinking about the precise value of the historical-critical method for theology and biblical interpretation. Yet, even when Barth broke with the liberal theological tradition of Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Herrman and Harnack, he still accepted historical criticism as a "preliminary work" in the task of theology (Barth 1933:7; cf.Schweitzer 1968:398-403). Moreover, Barth spoke of the positive role of historical criticism in continuing "the critical function of theology" which had been attempted by the Reformers, evidenced especially the latters' "concern for correct church proclamation in accordance with the word of God" (Barth 1932:251).

In the preface to his 1st edition of *Der Romerbrief* (1918), Barth insisted that "the historical-critical method of biblical investigation had its rightful place: it is concerned with the preparation of the intelligence and this can never be superfluous" (1933:1). In his 2nd edition of the same work (1921), Barth again insisted in response to those who felt him to be an enemy of historical criticism: "I have nothing whatever to say against historical criticism. I recognize it and once more state quite definitely that it is both necessary and justified" (1933:6). Elsewhere he accepted an important tenet of the historical-critical approach, viz., that the Bible is "a human document like any other, it can lay no *apriori* dogmatic claim to special attention and consideration" (Barth 1957:60).

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For all his affirmations of historical criticism, however, Barth was intensely critical of the fact that it had become a determinative method in the discipline of theology. We mention four problems which he identified with the historical method of biblical interpretation.

Firstly, the historical-critical method was problematic in the fruits it bore. Barth found evidence of this in the exegetical work of scholars such as Jülicher. Barth stated, "how closely he keeps to the mere deciphering of words as though they were runes. But when all is done, they still remain largely unintelligible" (Barth 1933:7). Little genuine attempt had been made to wrestle with the raw material of the text and with exegesis itself.

Secondly, the historical-critical study of the Bible was simply not critical enough (Barth 1933:8).[15] Barth criticized its 'scientific' approach which he saw as little more than a "guise" and a mode of interpretation that did not go beyond the presentation of "a disjointed series of notes on words and phrases (Barth 1933:1). For him a 'scientific' approach needed to accept the significance of the historicity of the biblical text. But then, the historical questions needed to be placed behind us as we gave crucial attention to "the special *content* of this document, the remarkable something which the writers of these

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[15]Krentz defends the self-critical dimension of practitioners of the historical-critical method. He sees it today as neither "historicistic" nor "positivistic". Neither is this method a threat to theology or faith (1975:47, 59-63, 66-68). He reminds us that "historical criticism has not had a corner on heresy" (1975:68). Very often "all generalities of historical criticism are overstatements" (1975:87). For all this, however, the second problem which Barth recognizes with the historical method continues to have profound validity and remains relevant for evaluating the dominant thrust of the historical enterprise, especially the form it took during and immediately following the Enlightenment.

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stories and those who stood behind them were concerned with, the Biblical object" (Barth 1957:60-61).

Thirdly, the historical study of the Bible did not take seriously enough its own finding. It did not accept the impossibility of any full proof historical reconstruction of the biblical text and meaning, whatever the arguments of some who refuted this charge. Instead, Barth appealed to *Christian faith* throughout history rather than *history* itself as the more justifiable entry point into an understanding of the Bible. In his Christology, for example, Barth affirmed the 'Christ of faith' as the more solid affirmation of biblical authenticity and witness to divine truth than any rediscovered 'Jesus of history' (cf.Schweitzer 1968:401-403).

Fourthly, the 'new' standards in biblical interpretation which historical criticism had established was seen by Barth to be in conflict with the Bible's own standards. Barth exclaimed, "their epitome was modern cultural awareness...a surrogate in the place of the Word of God which had now lost all concreteness for it and had volatilised into a mere idea" (1932:251-2). Even worse, "it now judged according to this surrogate" (Barth 1932:252).

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1.3.2. Method

Barth developed an essentially theological-critical or neo-orthodox approach to the Bible. This method was premised on the assumption that historical concerns were subservient to a theological understanding of *revelation* (Ramm 1970:71). For Barth, revelation involved the threefold notion of revealer, revelation and revealedness (Barth

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1932:295f.). It is not necessary to describe Barth's developed understanding of revelation in this thesis (cf.Barth 1932:109-118). We mention only Gottwald's helpful observation with regard to Barth's neo-orthodoxy. It was "an attractive way to harmonize the results of historical-critical biblical study with a 'high' view of biblical revelation" (Gottwald 1985:18).

Barth stressed that a priority in biblical interpretation was the need to 'hear' and 'see' what the biblical writers themselves 'heard' and 'saw' but which as such, remain inaudible or hidden from us (1937:63-64; cf.Barth 1957). When it came to biblical interpretation, he wished to take seriously the Bible's *own* witness.[16] Therefore, Barth reacted strongly against *both* Protestant orthodoxy which imposed its own criteria of 'objectivity' and 'truth' on the Bible, *and* liberal Protestantism which ignored or downplayed the complete record of the Bible as an authentic witness to the Word of God.

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The important question for Barth was what the decisive starting point for biblical interpretation was to be. The answer to *this* question determined at a fundamental level what was accepted as either 'objective' or 'true'. In his renowned *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum* (1931), Barth found the answer in the Reformers' emphasis on *faith* as the pre-eminent step in theology . In this way, he displaced the earlier stress on words, paragraphs and history as controlling factors in the understanding of the Bible (Mckim 1985:75). From Barth's perspective, "the sense of awe in the presence of

[16]This theological concern of Barth is shared by scholars such as Malina who use a social science approach to the Bible. However, we shall see that these scholars wish to take seriously the priority of not merely historical or theological concerns, but also sociological and anthropological ones. Cf. Part 3.

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history" which had characterized the historical-critical school was not "the awe of faith" (Herzog 1956:32). In response, therefore, "*he deepened the historical-critical method and supplemented it with a concern for the wholeness encompassing text and subject matter*" (Herzog 1956:321).

1.3.3. Appraisal

Some positive features of the neo-orthodox method of Karl Barth have already been implied in what has been said earlier. Clearly, he succeeded in shifting biblical hermeneutics beyond the limited horizons of those rationalist presuppositions which dominated so much of the historical school in previous decades. Barth went a long way to liberating the witness of the Bible for the project of human and social transformation, often so neglected by practitioners of the historical-critical method. As John Cobb states:

> He [Barth] brought the Bible in its own integrity into the contemporary discussion, making relative the power of the idealist tradition to control the way it was read and interpreted. He shifted attention from the ideas of God to God and God's actual work in the world (1986:172).

Furthermore, Barth's famous theology of the *revolution of God* had the potential to overcome many of the values, beliefs and ideas of bourgeois Christianity which were the fruit of the Enlightenment and which presented themselves in the variety of historical approaches to the Bible (Barth 1949; cf.Villa Vicencio 1988:45-58; cf.1-15; Brews 1987). Because of this, Barth has had an impact on many theologians and biblical scholars who are today committed to some form of theology of liberation (e.g.Cone 1986:44; Villa Vicencio 1988:44-58).

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However, for all these positive features and others not mentioned here, the neo-orthodox school of biblical interpretation and the biblical theology movement which Barth's method helped to spawn have come under attack. Among other things, Barth's method has been criticized for succumbing to a form of *biblicism*. This criticism is linked essentially to a perceived *a-historicism* in the neo-orthodox approach to the Bible. We mention only a few pertinent aspects of this critique as it is typified in the work of James Barr.[17]

Barr's fundamental problem with the neo-orthodox method is its revelation-centered theology and the use of this as a controlling factor in theological exegesis. Contrary to Barth, Barr maintains that while "on the basis of older custom, Bible and revelation should be thought to belong together", in the modern critical age this introduces "several particular problems" (1982:90). We focus on only one of the problems which Barr identifies in his work.

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Barr feels that Barth reflects an "embarrassment with historical criticism" (Barr 1982:92). While he acknowledges Barth's insistence on "the legitimacy of historical criticism", Barr argues that Barth does not apply the historical-critical theory sufficiently "as a central discriminating element in the choosing between one possible theological meaning and another" (1982:92). Consequently, Barth's concept of 'revelation' becomes the determiner of what is theologically valid exegesis and what is not, *yet* 'revelation' is

[17]Barr's bias must be understood at the outset, however. He clearly attempts to rekindle the importance of the historical-critical method in scholarship, especially in the study of the history of religion. He writes: "We hope to give more positive place to the history of religion and also to the place of historical criticism as a discriminating element in theological interpretations" (Barr 1982:102).

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understood as simultaneously synonymous with the Bible, and also distinguished from it. The overall effect of Barth's position is negative for Barr. It has made "biblical interpretation... into a blurred patterning of those biblical aspects which would admit conformity to a revelational viewpoint" while not taking account of the historical and linguistic form of the biblical text (1982:94).[18]

Brevard Childs poses the incisive question at issue here. Has Barth returned to a "*pre-critical*" approach to the Bible "as an unfortunate reaction against his past?" (Childs 1952:110, italics mine). In a defense of Barth, Childs argues that "Barr has failed to recognize that Barth has consistently worked from an avowed historical context, namely from the context of the Christian canon. Therefore, the work of historical critics remained for him only prolegomena to the real theological task of exegesis within the discipline of Church Dogmatics" (Childs 1952:111). Barth himself refuted the claims that he had fallen prey to a biblicism in his study of the Bible (cf.Barth 1933:12).

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But in support of those critics of Barth such as Barr, we suggest that while the biblical text itself can be a *witness* to revelation and *become* revelation, a time arises when the interpretation of this 'revelation' or the 'event' in which God encounters the individual must be critically made. In other words, Barth does engage seriously in theological reflection in his Church Dogmatics, yet it seems he does not feel the need to take as seriously the historical or material factors involved in shaping the biblical texts.

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[18]Again, we mention the concern of Malina and others to take more seriously the historical and linguistic issues in biblical texts which appear to be neglected by Karl Barth. Cf. Part 3.

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These factors are among those which raise critical questions about the particular 'revelation' which is received at any point in time.

Another limitation of Barth's theological method is that its stress on the 'Christ of faith' fails to satisfy the contemporary theological need to take (at least) more seriously the quest for the historical Jesus. Too quickly, Barth has attempted to overcome the problem of 'modern' history by affirming 'the non-historical character of biblical history' as its own and only valid criterion. Stated in another way, Barth's theological approach to the Bible has prepared the way for "a vapid mythological mysticism" which results from an exaggerated stress on the 'spiritual Christ' (Bowman 1949:189).

We sum up our brief remarks with regard to Barth's *theological* hermeneutic. It has helped immensely both to recognize and shift us away from some of the limitations of the historical-critical method. But Barth's method also possesses serious limitations of its own. *Firstly*, it does not do full justice to the historical, sociological and anthropological contexts of biblical theological traditions, especially those of early Christianity. Rowley reminds us that

> while it is not sufficient to understand what the original writer meant by his words, or what his first readers took them to mean, it is intolerable to treat this as negligible. From here all interpretations must start, though it fall short if it stops here (1947:16-17).

Secondly, the theological method of Barth does not escape making the Bible "a textbook of doctrine", and in so doing neglects the Bible as "a handbook of liberation" (Herzog, in Assman 1976:11). Despite it being an alternative method to that of historical criticism, therefore, the neo-orthodox method is also unable to free itself from captivity to the ideological agenda of Western theological ideas and beliefs.

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We turn finally to a discussion of the social-scientific criticism of the Bible, especially of the NT writings. Because this school of interpretation receives primary focus in our thesis, we shall give greater attention to it than we gave to either the historical or theological methods described earlier.

1.4. The Social Science Method

1.4.1. Emergence

The *sociological* studies of Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber make us aware that this particular discipline has been around for quite a long time. In terms of biblical studies, social science methodologies surface in Weber's studies on *Ancient Judaism* near the end of World War 1 (cf.Rodd 1979:457-469). But European neo-orthodoxy largely came to displace the social concerns of earlier scholarship.

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Still, the development of social and anthropological approaches in the field of biblical studies continued to surface from time to time. Some examples of these approaches are evident in the works of scholars such as Deismann, Lochmeyer, Cadoux, Alt, and Noth, and (in the USA in particular) among those representatives of the Chicago school which drew on the concerns of liberal Christianity and the social gospel (cf.Funk 1976:4-22; Scroggs 1983:338; Smith 1975:19; Kee 1980:16-17; Tuckett 1987:136; Horsley 1989:2).

A number of factors contributed to the renewed interest in and growth of importance of the social sciences in biblical study. Among these factors were (i) frustration with traditional techniques of biblical interpretation and their inability to bring

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the texts back to life, (ii) the emergent archaeological discoveries and the increasing availability of extra-biblical evidence, and (iii) the inescapable rise to prominence of various social issues and conflicts during the last few decades (cf.Horsley 1989:1-2).

It is certain that the overwhelming concern with sociological and anthropological issues in the Bible surfaced firstly and most intensely among some OT scholars (cf.Wilson 1984). In recent decades, social science approaches to OT studies have been evident in the works of such notable scholars as P. Hanson (1975; 1979); N.K. Gottwald (1979; 1985; 1986), R.B. Coote and K.W. Whitelam (1986); M.L. Chaney (1986), F.S. Frick (1986), and R.B. Coote and M. P. Coote (1990).

A similar surge of interest in social science studies of the NT, especially of early Christianity, came relatively later. One reason for this 'delay' is that NT studies battled to break free from an overemphasis on historical, literary and theological agendas, to the detriment of social and sociological concerns (Smith 1975:19). It was only in the 1970s and 1980s that social science methods were applied in earnest, not only to the study of the Bible in general, but also to the origins of early Christianity in particular.[19]

In terms of its methodological emphasis, the starting point of social-scientific criticism of the Bible claimed to be a new one. Biblical texts were accepted consciously now, with all other texts, not only as historical or theological works, but also as *social* and *cultural* productions. In other words, the biblical texts were viewed as productions of particular social and cultural systems which gave meaning to these texts.

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[19]J.H. Elliott provides a substantial, though not exhaustive, list of social science studies of the social world of early Christianity which emerged in the 1980s (1986:2,27-33; cf.Horsley 1989:5, 11.

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Consequently, these systems themselves needed to be understood if we were to interpret the biblical texts more accurately. Thomas Best expresses one positive conviction shared by practitioners of this new approach:

> [W]e must begin with the early believers in their concrete historical reality rather than with an abstract 'early church' which is often merely a vehicle for the theology of the NT writings (1983:183).

Although social-scientific criticism may at first appear to be reminiscent of the tenor of the older historical-critical method, we shall soon see that some significant differences exist between the two. For now, we mention only the fact that the social science method moved beyond an emphasis on only the *historical* analysis of texts to understanding them as formations of particular *social* structures, processes and forces. Gottwald articulates one motivating question for social-scientific criticism:

> What social structures and social processes are explicit or implicit in the biblical literature, in the scattered socio-economic data it contains, in the overtly political history it recounts, and in the religious beliefs and practices it attests (1985:26)?

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This means, today, that any social science method which is applied, for example, to texts of early Christianity and NT theology, concerns itself with understanding the production and meaning of these texts in relation to their *sociohistorical setting* or what Henry J. Cadbury terms, their *Weltanschauung* or culture (in Kee 1980:11, 21-22). It then seeks to interpret the evidence in a manner that is attuned and sympathetic to the ancient social world in which the text was produced (Kee 1980:8). Any other hermeneutical attempt to understand early Christianity or the NT writings is perceived as falling prey, not only to the old peril of the historical school which modernized Jesus (cf.Schweitzer 1968), but also to that one which modernizes the early church (Best

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1983:183). The social science method desires to transcend both these perils. Its underlying premise is that *social forces*, whether "social order and harmony" (the structural-functional model) or "social struggle and change" (the materialist or conflict model) or "social behavior on the basis of shared socio-cultural meanings and values" (the symbolic-interaction model), directly provide indispensable answers regarding the social and religious meanings of texts" (Malina 1983:11; cf.Malina and Neyrey 1988:145; Turner 1978:13-14). Of course, social answers are considered "indispensable" because practitioners of the social science method believe that without them we can neither fully understand the meaning of texts, nor the proper nature of Christian origins.[20]

In short, practitioners of the social science method, demonstrate that early Christianity and the NT writings are not modern phenomena as Western readers (particularly) are often prone to believe. Rather, both emerge from socio-cultural milieux radically different from those of the Western world. This observation has many implications, one being that "the better we come to know the early Christian movement, the stranger, paradoxically, it seems to be" (Best 1983:184).[21]

We may now appreciate the emergence of the social science method against the background of the historical and theological methods discussed earlier. The main query which practitioners of the social science method have with practitioners of the other two methods is that they have neglected and often ignored asking *how?* and *why?* questions

[20]Cf. 1.2.2. This assumption of practitioners of the social science method must be critically addressed. Cf. 4.2.2.3.

[21]As we shall discover in Part 3, the 'foreign' world of the NT writings is an important starting point of Bruce Malina's hermeneutic.

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in relation to *socio-cultural* structures, norms, processes, forces, etc. which have influenced and shaped NT beliefs and practices (Best 1983:181). This may not mean, as some practitioners of the social science method may at times suggest, that *how?* or *why?* questions have never being raised by the practitioners of the other methods. Clearly they have often done this, albeit from the perspective of their own critical approaches to NT studies. Yet the historical and theological methods demonstrate a preponderance to questions such as the *when? what? where?* and *when?* of beliefs, doctrines, and experiences.

We may now mention some additional differences method which practitioners of the social science method claim set them apart from those who use the historical and theological methods for NT criticism. *Firstly,* they insist that they do not ignore historical or theological questions.[22] But they show that the thrust of former historical inquiries of the Bible has been to focus almost exclusively on the *theological ideas* of key biblical figures (e.g.Moses; David; Jesus; Paul) or *institutions* (e.g.the Temple; the Church), or on the *historical development of ideas or doctrines* (e.g.the Law; justification by faith). Moreover, conflicts within the biblical texts have been analyzed essentially in terms of a *conflict of ideas* (e.g.between Israelite and Canaanite religion; between Jesus and his opponents, such as the Pharisees and Sadducees).

Secondly, practitioners of the social science method expose the fallacy of earlier historical approaches. They demonstrate how this kind of historical analysis focussed only on one part of a more complex historical reality which it then assumed to be the

[22]This factor shall become clearer as we proceed, especially in Part 3.

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whole of that reality (Wanamaker 1987:3; cf.Herzog 1974:393; Best 1983:181-182). The 'scientific' perspective of historical studies, moreover underrated the significant fact that science itself is neither "an isolated or neutral undertaking", but "first and fundamentally...a social activity" which must be appreciated (Barber 1952:4;cf.3-6).

Robin Scroggs' incisive critique regarding the *idealism* in much of traditional historical approaches to the NT is typical of other scholars within the social science tradition of NT interpretation. He states that

> [T]o some it seemed that too often the discipline of the theology of the New Testament (the history of ideas) operates out of a methodological docetism, as if believers had minds and spirits unconnected with their individual and corporate bodies (1983:339; cf.Elliott 1982:3-4; Meeks 1983:2; etc.).[23]

From Scroggs' perspective, then, the sociology of early Christianity in particular is an attempt "to put body and soul together again" (1983:339). We must, of course, evaluate whether sociological (and anthropological) approaches succeed in this task and whether the social-scientific criticism of the Bible in general offers hope for a more *holistic* hermeneutics today.[24]

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Thirdly, practitioners of the social science method insist that practitioners of the theological method needed to take more seriously than they did the sociological and cultural formation of Jewish and Christian ideas and beliefs reflected in the Bible. The

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[23]What Scroggs and others observe regarding the historical method is also true of many aspects of theological and literary criticism in the last few generations (cf.Horsley 1989:3).

[24]In Part 3 we explore the cultural hermeneutic of Bruce Malina in an attempt to answer this question.

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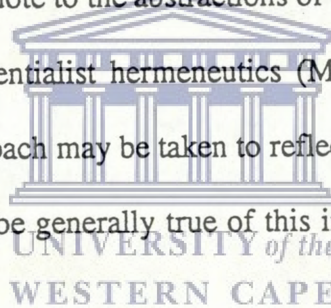
earlier practitioners failed to understand that the 'strange new world of the Bible' was not only a matter of 'revelation', but also the 'the witness' or 'product' of people who lived in socio-cultural systems very different from those of the contemporary world. According to practitioners of the social science method, then, the tendency of earlier theological perspectives to overlook the socio-cultural dimensions of the Bible often led to a misunderstanding of the Bible's witness in the first place.

We conclude our discussion on the emergence of the social science method with a comment from Wayne Meeks who speaks more directly of the value of a sociological approach over against the other methods of interpretation. A sociological approach assays to function, he writes, "as an antidote to the abstractions of the history of ideas and to the subjective individualism of existentialist hermeneutics (Meeks 1982:2). What Meeks states about the sociological approach may be taken to reflect what all practitioners of the social science method believe to be generally true of this interpretative tradition.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1.4.2. Method

In a pertinent essay in which he reviews three sociological interpretations of early Christianity, John Gager distinguishes between the terms *social history* and *sociological*. The former approach denotes "a *description* of the relevant social data", an approach evident in the works of R.M. Grant (1977) and A.J. Malherbe (1977). The latter approach illustrated in the pioneering work of G. Theissen (1977/1978), seeks the "*explanation* of social facts", (Gager 1983: 428-440; cf. Tuckett 1987:139-145;). In his

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study *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter*, J.H. Elliott (1982) affirms the same distinction which Gager makes:

> The terms 'social' and 'sociological' have generally been used indiscriminately so that mere social description has been equated - erroneously - with sociological explanation. What has been lacking is a process for ascertaining not only *what* the sociohistorical circumstances of given traditions and compositions were but also *how* and *why* these circumstances gave rise to the productions under consideration (1982:3).

More recently, Swedish NT scholar Bengt Holmberg has described these distinctions in terms of "protosociological" and "sociological" respectively (1990:4-6).

But even when Gager distinguishes between social description and sociological explanation, he is careful not to make an absolute or too rigid distinction between the two.

> The two approaches are certainly not antithetical; indeed, any sociological analysis must build upon the foundations of social historians. But neither are they identical. Each of these tasks is necessary *and* distinctive (1983:429).

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Some scholars have felt that, in practical terms, the distinction is perhaps unnecessary (e.g. Schüssler Fiorenza 1983: 71-72; Tuckett 1987:148, n.8). Others have accepted the distinction, but reminded us that social description is indispensable for the task of sociological explanation (e.g.Horsley 1989:8; cf.Gager 1982:259).

Summing up the significance of the sociological method, Gager writes:

> [it] clearly points us in the direction of a specific academic discipline- sociology- and this introduces the full range of explanatory theories and hypotheses that characterize this discipline" (Gager 1983:429; cf.1982:258; Scroggs 1983:347).

Yet the sociological method is but *one* of the major disciplines which have come to characterize the social-scientific criticism of the Bible in general and of early Christianity

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in particular. Another important discipline, and one that receives specific attention in this thesis, is that of *cultural* or *social anthropology*. Like its allied discipline of sociology, cultural anthropology has contributed significantly to the "methodological pluralism" of social-scientific criticism (Gager 1983:429; cf.Best 1983:187; Gottwald 1985:27-29). For example, the concern of Scroggs (1983:339) for a more accessible biblical methodology is shared by Bruce Malina who takes to heart the loss of "the sheer delight of reading and using the Bible as it is" (1983:119). Of course, what Malina advises is neither a return to the more sterile methods of the 1970s, nor the abandonment of the contributions of historical, theological and literary criticisms of the Bible. Rather, he wishes to understand the *language* of the Bible as a *social system* which is absolutely essential for appreciating it as a book that *communicates* (Malina 1983:120-129).

But Malina is aware that for the Bible to be a book that communicates, we must overcome the gulf of communication between the original writer(s) and the contemporary reader(s), that is, those differences of encoded meanings in language systems of the Bible on the one hand, and those meanings of present day readers on the other (1983:122; 1986:1-3). In seeking a solution to this problem in biblical interpretation, Malina draws heavily on both sociolinguistic analysis and cultural anthropology (1986:5-13; cf.1981; 1983:129-131). His hermeneutical concern is to find a method to decode the social system(s) in which the biblical texts are embedded in order to facilitate and enrich the actual present day reading of the Bible, mainly by mainstream North Americans.[25]

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[25]Cf. Part 3.

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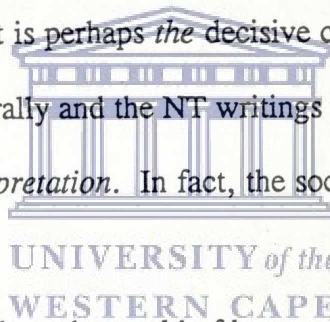
Up to this point, our preliminary remarks about various forms of the social science method reflect their different attempts to take seriously some neglected or ignored factors in some of the earlier interpretative methods. Practitioners of the social science method accept, in the classical sense, that political, economic, social, and cultural forces are "the crucible from which all human experiences emerge and which shape and then in turn are shaped by the cognitive activity of human beings" (Wanamaker 1987:3; cf.Scroggs 1983:347; Meeks 1983; Theissen 1978). But the best of these practitioners also grapple with the theological concerns of scholars such as Barth who wished to revitalize the Bible as (also) words from God and intended for faith and life.

We now describe what is perhaps *the* decisive contribution of the social sciences to the study of the Bible generally and the NT writings particularly. This is undoubtedly their focus on *models of interpretation*. In fact, the social sciences are disciplines which are fundamentally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> based upon models of how the world of human interaction works and why it works that way. Specifically, the social sciences look to how meanings are imposed on men and women to seek to explain human behavior in terms of typicalities (Malina 1983:15).

The stress on *typicalities* or *generalities* in human behavior, beliefs, values and experiences is what begins to distinguish the social sciences from other disciplines such as history. As Malina assesses it:

> History, with its roots in the present and a set of working images of the past, seeks to explain events in terms of the distinctiveness of agents and agencies, in terms of particularities and differences. The other social sciences, rooted in the present, prescind from the past for the most part to seek out generalities, commonalities, sameness (1983:15; cf.Best 1983:188).

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Yet history has to assume commonalities in order to derive particular distinctives in the past, but it cannot explain how or why such commonalities or distinctives arise in the first place. This fact might explain why historical criticism of the Bible, especially during the Enlightenment, based much of its assumptions regarding the 'common' or 'typical' (in relation to the past) upon rather ethnocentric intuitions. For interpreters who use the social sciences, however, a more sophisticated procedure is required:

> [T]o interpret texts (units of meaning) from the past, the interpreter has to imagine how meanings functioned, how they operated, how they related to each other, in terms of the persons, things, and events of the past that embodied meanings (Malina 1983:16).

In order to satisfy this interpretative agenda, practitioners of the social science method insist on the necessity of definite models of interpretation. But what precisely do these practitioners understand by the term 'model'?

Thomas Carney has aptly described the term 'model' as "a slippery concept" (1975:7). Acknowledging the key role that conceptual models play in the social-scientific study of the NT, J.H. Elliott also recognizes how thwart with confusion the definition of a 'model' often remains (1986:3). Subsequently, he moves beyond the broader understanding of 'model' in common parlance towards an understanding that can better satisfy the "terminological clarity and precision" of scientific usage (1986:3).[26]

Elliott is not the first to seek a definition of "model" that satisfies the requirements of scientific rigor. His own discussion is consciously indebted to many other scholars

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[26]Elliott (1986:3) identifies the variety of ways the term 'model' is generally used, either in association with or as a synonym for metaphor, example, exemplar, analogy, image, type, reproduction, representation, illustration, pattern, parallel, symbol, paradigm.

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(cf.Barbour 1974:6; Malina 1981:17; 1982:231; Carney 1975:7-8). Elliott is also not unaware of the various classification schemes for models which present themselves (Elliott 1986:5; cf.Richardson 1984:1-18; Carney 1975:9-11). But the definition that he provides does afford us a shorthand way of getting to the essence of what we mean by a model and how critical NT scholarship within the social science tradition employs the term today.

> Models are...conceptual vehicles for articulating, applying, testing, and possibly reconstructing theories used in the analysis and interpretation of specific social data. The difference between a model and an analogy lies in the fact that the model is *consciously structured*, and *systematically arranged* in order to serve as a *speculative instrument* for the purpose of organization, profiling, and interpreting a complex welter of detail (1986:5).

The social data which social science models help us to analyze and interpret include social behavior, social structures, and social processes which emerge out of the NT writings themselves and from the perspective of the people who occupy their social world (Elliott 1986:5-6). These models also provide a way for understanding the *socio-cultural* context in which the worldviews, beliefs, values, and practices described in the NT writings originated and were proclaimed. In this sense, we may state that these social science models provide us with *emic* descriptions (cf.Malina 1986:190; cf.Malina and Neyrey 1988:137,139).

However, a more significant requirement of models is their ability not only to include "the world of the observed" (the 'foreigners' of the NT world), but also "the world of the observer" (the contemporary readers of the NT writings), in "some articulate, non-impressionistic, and independently verifiable way" (Malina 1986:190).

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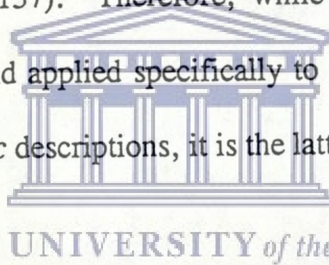
Here we speak of the ability of social science models to provide *etic* descriptions. It is this latter quality of models which most clearly expresses their explanatory value and utility for addressing the problem of the so-called "hermeneutical gap" in understanding between the people and world of the NT texts and the people and world of the contemporary reader(s) of these NT texts (Malina 1986:190; cf.Malina and Neyrey 1988:137,139).

Although both *emic* and *etic* descriptions are important and necessary for practitioners of the social science method, it is the *etic* descriptive power or the cross-cultural perspective of social science models which are of primary importance to them (Malina and Neyrey 1988:137). Therefore, while the cultural anthropological models examined in this thesis and applied specifically to the study of the NT writings give attention to both *emic* and *etic* descriptions, it is the latter which is of greater interest to us.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In light of the above, we can better appreciate the fundamental importance of models for a social-scientific interpretation of the NT writings and their social world. Carney further reminds us that the choice in scholarship is not whether to use models or not, but rather "whether to use them consciously or unconsciously" (1975:5). Although models have not been unique to practitioners of the social science method, Carney implies that earlier usages of models have tended to be unconscious rather than conscious. In contrast, any social science approach to the NT distinguishes itself by making a *conscious* use of models. Elliott describes the significance of this conscious choice:

> Here, where the aim is to apply theory to the observation and interpretation of data, the function of conceptual models is to consciously, deliberately

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> explicate the theories, involved in one's research so that these theories and all the presuppositions they involve can be tested and thus confirmed, disproved, modified or discarded (1986:6).

But even the conscious use of models is not without some problems. One critical issue recognized by those scholars who widely employ social science models is how they may avoid "misfitting real world experiences" within the framework of a particular model which remains by definition "generalizations or abstract descriptions of real world experiences" (Malina 1981:17). Malina proposes *three* steps, which help to reduce the distortions which models may produce. *Firstly*, a model, theory, or paradigm is postulated. *Secondly*, the model is tested against the experiences of the real world to which it relates. *Thirdly*, the model is subsequently modified, depending on the test results. The aim is to reduce any misfit caused by either errors of omission or commission (1981:17). The three steps identified by Malina contribute to a 'scientific' method, which "serves as a safeguard against the twin pitfalls of human understanding: superficiality and inaccuracy" (Malina 1981:17).[27]

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At this stage, we do not provide a critical appraisal of social science methods themselves. It is our aim, firstly, to make a more detailed study of a *particular* use of the social science method in NT studies[28] before we evaluate the significance and potential of social science methods as a whole.[29] However, as we proceed with our explorations of the social science method in the following two parts of our thesis (focussing on cultural

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[27]Cf. 3.2.1.

[28]Cf. Part 3.

[29]Cf. Part 4.

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anthropology), we should bear some critical questions in mind. These questions have already been raised in the introduction and will be directly addressed in the final part of our thesis. (i) Do social science methods succumb to a form of reductionism in their approach to the NT writings, or are they able to transcend the dualism of history and theology (cf.Best 1983:183; Nations 1980:71)?[30] (ii) Are practitioners of the social science method ideologically captive to the ideas and values of Western culture and scholarship, or are they explicitly conscious and self-critical of the limitations of their particular class and intellectual interests and so able to transcend them (cf.Mosala 1989:43-66; Horsley 1989:6-7)? (iii) Do social science methods demonstrate either an 'advance' or a 'paradigm shift' in NT interpretation, or do they merely represent one tradition among other equally necessary (and limited) interpretative traditions?

1.5. Concluding Summary

We summarize our aims in the first part of this thesis. In the *first* place, we wished to survey critically, if briefly, the nature and scope of three major critical methods of biblical interpretation which developed since the Enlightenment. Our survey focussed on the historical, neo-orthodox (theological) and social science methods of interpretation. Our major concern was how these different methods contribute to the study of the NT writings, and the vital concerns of Christian origins and NT theology.

We have shown that both the historical and theological methods have made important contributions to the field of biblical inter-pretation in general, and NT

[30]Here, we will need to take seriously the challenges of the new literary critical method which is not dealt with in our critical survey in Part 1.

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interpretation in particular. But each of these methods have been limited in the critical scope and depth of their analyses of the NT writings. Both methods neglect, ignore, or seem unable to address many questions which practitioners of the social science method bring to the NT writings and which they consider vital to its fuller and more accurate understanding. Among these questions are those which pertain to the socio-cultural structures, processes and forces which have influenced human beliefs and practices as they are reflected in the NT writings. Primary among the questions which motivate practitioners of the social science method are the how? and the why? of beliefs and practices described in the NT writings.

In the *second* place, we provided the broader context within which to appreciate and evaluate the cultural anthropological method that receives particular focus in our study.

We proceed in Part two to explore the cultural anthropology of Mary Douglas. Her work has acquired great importance and value for some NT scholars. Among these scholars is Bruce Malina whose appropriation of some of Douglas' cultural anthropological models for understanding the NT writings receives special attention in Part 3.

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PART TWO

THE CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF MARY DOUGLAS: A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

2.1. Introductory

In our main introduction we mentioned how important the cultural anthropology of Mary Douglas has become, especially for certain NT scholars. It is now necessary to make a more detailed study of Douglas' work. *Firstly*, we discuss Douglas' overall *cultural perspective*. This discussion forms the basis for understanding and assessing the value of her work as a whole.

Secondly, we provide a more detailed analysis of (only) two major theoretical constructs in Douglas' work which have proved extremely valuable for NT scholarship. The first of these is her understanding of *purity and pollution systems* and their function in any society. The second is her important *group-grid categorical scheme* which has become an extremely useful heuristic tool for cross-cultural analysis. As we progress with our discussion, we hope to develop a deeper sense, not only of Douglas' own view of culture and some of her theoretical constructs, but also of her methodology, how it functions and the results it produces.

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Our primary aim in Part 2 may be described, then, as an attempt to provide some insight into Douglas' cultural anthropology which will form the basis for our later study of Bruce Malina's cultural hermeneutic, particularly his appropriation of her models for the study of the NT writings and their social world. We shall also be in a better position

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to assess the explanatory value and utility of Douglas' constructs and methodology for an understanding Christian origins and NT theology.

2.2. Cultural Perspective

Scholars of Douglas' work have observed that she "approaches culture primarily from the standpoint of everyday life. Hers is a world of ordinary symbols, rituals, objects, and activities all of which dramatize the construction of social life" (Wuthnow *et al.* 1984:77).

In *Cultural Bias* (1978), Douglas demonstrates how mundane and broad her interests are. Her methodology incorporates the study of everything from nature and cultural processes (e.g. gardening, cookery, medicine) and time (e.g. old age, youth and time past), to those issues of society both at a corporate level (e.g. distributive justice, punishment) and a radical individual level (e.g. the hermit). She is also keenly concerned with the critical concerns of modern (Western) society, such as the environment (e.g.Douglas and Wildavsky 1982). Douglas does not neglect what is generally accepted as the significant concerns of anthropology such as ritual, magic, taboo, witchcraft cosmologies, purity and pollution rules, to name only a few. But, as we shall soon discover, her interest in the mundane activities is grounded in the anthropological perception that these activities, and not only the traditional religious practices of cultures, bear the imprints of the ceremonial and the ritual (cf.Wuthnow *et.al.* 1984:88). Clearly, then, the cultural anthropology of Mary Douglas suggests a break with the radical dichotomy between the sacred and the profane which is so peculiar to 'scientific' Western

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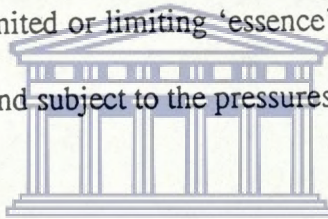
society. Her anthropology also rejects culture as being in any sense autonomous and an entity that can be explained quite apart from other social "themes" (Douglas 1978:1).[1]

One striking feature evident in Douglas' more *holistic* approach to anthropology is the consistent way in which her cultural perspective is directly related to her methodological approach. This approach "is pitched at a relatively low level of abstraction, [and] depends heavily on the basis of revealing examples rather than philosophical argument (Wuthnow *et.al.*1984:78; cf.Douglas 1978:3).

We shall now probe what constitutes for Douglas the essence of any cultural system. This is not to imply that culture assumes the character of something narrow or static (defined in terms of some limited or limiting 'essence'). On the contrary, culture remains for Douglas quite pliable and subject to the pressures of social change as we shall later discover (1978:6).



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2.2.1. 'Dirt' as a cultural system

In her important earlier work *Purity and Danger* (1966),[2] Douglas views *dirt* as pivotal to her entire exploration of what constitutes a cultural system. The definition of 'dirt' that she provides extends beyond "abstract pathogenicity and hygiene", the spheres to which (especially) Western cultures generally confine its discussion. Instead she

[1]Douglas defines "themes" in the technical sense "to denote a postulate or position, declared or implied, and usually controlling behaviour or stimulating activity, which is tacitly approved or openly promoted in a society" (1978:1).

[2] Douglas herself accepts this as only a preliminary work. She comments in her introduction to *Purity and Danger*: "This book represents a personal view, controversial and often premature". But she does insist that it remains a serious attempt to address "one of the subjects which has hitherto suffered from being handled too narrowly within a single discipline" (1966:viii).

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recovers what is "the old definition of dirt as matter out of place" (1966:35; cf.1968:338). Douglas continues:

> This is a very suggestive approach. It implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order. Dirt then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements. *This idea of dirt takes us straight into the field of symbolism and promises a link-up with more obviously symbolic systems of purity*" (1966:35, italics mine; cf.1975:53; 1968:338-339; Eagleton 1967:403-404).

From the above statement we may understand that Douglas' great stress on 'dirt' which undergirds her own cultural perspective, also gives considerable attention to related constructs. These include (i) 'order' and 'disorder' (ii) 'symbols' and 'systems of classification' (iii) 'purity' and 'impurity' (iv) 'boundary-crossing' (suggested by her allusion to a "rejecting [of] inappropriate elements"), and (v) the notion of 'correlation' or 'analogy' (implied by her reference to "a link-up" in symbolic systems). Later, we make more detailed references to these other constructs in Douglas' work. Our immediate concern is to describe something of her own framework for understanding 'dirt' as a central cultural concept.

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Douglas views the concept of 'dirt' as a fluid and relative notion, rather than in any way either a static or absolute depiction of objects in society. She illustrates what she means by way of examples:

> Shoes are not dirty in themselves, but it is dirty to place them on the dining-table; food is not dirty in itself, but it is dirty to leave cooking utensils in the bedroom, or food bespattered on clothing; similarly, bathroom equipment in the drawing room; clothing lying on chairs; out-door things in-doors; upstairs things downstairs; under-clothing appearing where over-clothing should be, and so on (Douglas 1966:35-36).

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Douglas proceeds to a vital comment which links her definition of 'dirt' with such *classification systems* in society as purity and pollution rules:

> ...our pollution behaviour is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications...Defined in this way [dirt] appears as a residual category, rejected from our normal scheme of classifications...[from where] all our impressions are schematically determined from the start" (1966:36).

'Dirt', then, is indispensable in the construction of "a stable world in which objects have recognisable shapes, are located in depth, and have permanence" (1966:36). 'Dirt', or its counterpart 'purity', becomes "an abstract way of dealing with the values, maps and structures of a given social group...a map of a social system which coordinates and classifies things according to their appropriate place". (Neyrey 1986:93-94). What Douglas has done is to redefine the meanings of purity and impurity, not in terms of some limited notions of the 'sacred' and the 'profane', but rather within the larger framework of meaning defined by the meaning 'dirt' (cf.1966:2-4; 1982b:213-216; Isenberg and Owen 1977:2).

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2.2.2. The acceptable, the ambiguous, and the anomalous

We must now ask how "dirt as a cultural system" *functions*, specifically as this system is expressed in a society's purity and pollution rules. Douglas (1966:36) identifies *three cues* to which such a system responds: (i) the acceptable, (ii) the ambiguous, and (iii) the anomalous.

Acceptable cues are the easiest to understand, since they are those cues which are simply incorporated into our stable construction of the world. In this sense it is

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acceptable that shoes are in place on our feet or on the floor, but out of place or dirty on the dining-room table. More difficult to understand, and therefore in need of further explanation are ambiguous cues and anomalous cues. *Ambiguous cues* are those cues which may or may not be harmonized with our patterned view of the world. For example, Douglas refers to treacle (molasses) as neither solid nor liquid and capable of being classified in both categories . But the function of ambiguity is not confined to mundane items such as treacle (molasses). Ambiguity is also valuable for appreciating, among other things, the richness of literature (Douglas 1966:37).

Anomalous cues are those cues which do not fit with the rest of our patterned view of the world and which are generally rejected. For example, the pig is anomalous in the Jewish worldview, as the pangolin ('scaly ant-eater') is in Lele culture.[3] However, it is important to see that ambiguity and anomaly are also not rigid categories in any culture, but subject to revision and reinterpretation by members of a particular culture.[4]

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Douglas accepts that ambiguous and anomalous cues are not synonymous. However, she maintains that in terms of their practical effects, these two elements are best treated as related rather than distinct categories. For example, while treacle (molasses) may be considered an ambiguous element, it can be classified as anomalous since it fits into neither the liquid nor the solid classification scheme (Douglas 1966:37).

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[3]Cf. 2.3.2.

[4]Cf. 2.3.2.4.

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Douglas describes *five* ways in which any culture may respond to ambiguous and anomalous elements (1966:39-40): (i) Ambiguity is reduced by adopting one or other interpretation for difficult events, occurrences or beliefs. For example, the Nuer tribe labels monstrous births in the same category as baby hippopotamuses. In this way, the tribe reduces the threat posed by monstrous births in terms of its defining boundary lines between humans and animals.

(ii) Anomaly can be physically controlled. For example, the necks of night-crowing cocks are promptly wrung, so that they do not live to contradict the belief that a cock is a bird that crows at dawn

(iii) Anomaly can be avoided, and in this way the classification system of the particular culture is reinforced. For example, the avoidance of crawling things in the Leviticus dietary laws also strengthens the category of those things which should be approved.

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(iv) Anomalous events are seen as dangerous, and the perception of this danger helps the individual to place an interpretation of the events above dispute, reduce dissonance in beliefs, and so reinforce conformity to the moral norms of the society. For example, the work of Festinger demonstrates how a person who finds his/her own convictions in disagreement with those of his/her friends might submit to their convictions, or alternatively the person might try to convince the friends of their error.

(v) Ambiguous symbols are able to enrich meaning in cultures through rituals and so help to reveal other levels of existence not otherwise considered or recognized within the particular cultural system. In this way, the anamolous pangolin in Lele culture also

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becomes (through the pangolin cult or ritual act) the celebration of the anomalous.[5] What Douglas hints at here is something extremely valuable in the broader scope of her cultural perspective. For as she asserts in the final chapter of *Purity and Danger*, "dirt, which is normally destructive, sometimes becomes creative" (Douglas 1966:159; cf.159-179).

How cultural systems respond to the ambiguous and the anomalous provides an important context within which to appreciate Douglas' understanding of the meaning and function of culture. She writes:

> Culture, in the sense of public, standardized values of community, mediates the experience of individuals. It provides in advance some basic categories, a positive pattern in which ideas and values are tidily ordered. And above all, it has authority, since each is induced to assert because of the assent of others. But its public character makes its categories more rigid. A private person may devise his pattern of assumptions or not. It is a private matter. But cultural categories are public matters. They cannot so easily be subject to revision. Yet they cannot neglect the challenge of aberrant forms. Any given system of classification must give rise to anomalies, and any culture must confront events which seem to defy its assumptions. It cannot ignore the anomalies which its scheme produces, except at risk of forfeiting confidence. This is why, I suggest, we find in any culture worthy of the name various provisions for dealing with ambiguous or anomalous events (1966:39; 1966:128).

In his short essay, "The Politics of the Sacred", Terry Eagleton recognizes the concern of Douglas for what are the "margins and boundaries" of society (1967:404). For it is at these "pressure" points that culture demonstrates its significance within the broader framework of social structures. It confronts and provides ways to deal with

[5]Cf. 2.3.2.4.

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> the gaps and interstices in its structure where it blends into chaos. To preserve the defining contours, rules and taboos are systematized to categorize experience which falls along these margins (Eagleton 1967:404).

We sum up our discussion of Douglas understanding of culture at this stage. Culture is understood in terms of 'dirt' and the response to the "aberrant", the "ambiguous" and the "anomalous". Yet, what appears to be more crucial in society is not 'dirt' per se, but rather its *location* as "matter out of place". Wuthnow *et.al* recognize how this fact further relates to a whole system of moral order:

> Being dirty or clean, then, is not just a matter of factual location; it is not just a purely cognitive issue. It is not that scraps of food are clean when on the plate and dirty when on the table, but that they *should* be on the plate, and *not* on the table (1984:87).

Yet 'dirt' is not only capable of a negative understanding. It also has the potential to function creatively in society, bringing about its renewal and transformation, especially through definite acts of ritual.[6]
Douglas' cultural perspective appears to eliminate the rigid distinctions which too often exist (especially in Western society) between the *sacred* and the *secular*, and between *primitive* and *modern* societies. As she herself argues, the "same principles" of 'order

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[6]Wuthnow *et.al.* capture the special significance of *ritual* in Douglas' whole cultural scheme and in this way allude to it as a viable form of communication in similar vein to language. "For her, ritual 'is pre-eminently a form of communication' a kind of language which communicates social information, and as such helps to replenish society's collective sentiments. As such ritual should be treated like speech, which transmits culture and is generated in social relations" (1984:103). The implications of ritual as transmitters of culture and for understanding religious behavior is readily apparent to Douglas (cf.1982a:21) as it is to NT scholars who appropriate her work. Cf. Part 3.

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and disorder' and of 'clean and unclean/dirt' apply equally throughout the different cultures (Douglas 1966:40).[7]

The importance of Douglas' work for the comparative study of religion now gains greater clarity and meaning (cf.Douglas 1966:6-7). She provides what appears to be a vital methodology for bridging the gap (*distance*) between ancient cultural milieux (e.g. NT texts) and those cultures of modern readers (e.g. North Americans).

We turn now to a more systematic focus on the first of Douglas' major theoretical constructs mentioned earlier, viz., purity and pollution systems in society.

2.3. <u>The Purity And Pollution System</u>

In our analysis of Douglas' work in this area we are indebted to the review of her work by Isenberg and Owen (1977). They highlight how "the logic and function" of the purity and pollution system affords a significant understanding of the socialization process which is reflected at every level of society, whether personal, social, cultic or cosmic (Isenberg and Owen 1977:2). Stated in another way, the classification system provided by purity and pollution rules "*correlates* with the patterns of all other classification systems in a given society" (Isenberg and Owen 1977:2-3, italics mine). We first attempt to illustrate the nature of this correlation by reference to Douglas' important 'link' between the physical and the social body in any cultural system. Next we discuss in some detail the development of Douglas' understanding of the nature and function of purity-pollution rules in a variety of cultural systems, although we center our discussion

[7]Cf. 3.2.1.1. Here Malina, drawing on Douglas, assumes the same thing.

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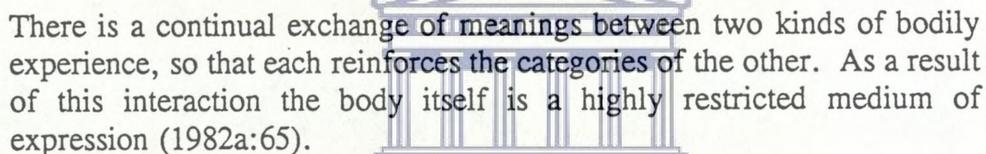
on her so-called "The Abominations of Leviticus" in ancient Israelite society (cf.Douglas 1966:41-57).

2.3.1. Body and society

Douglas' observations of different cultures lead her to find within them a fundamental correlation between purity-pollution rules which govern the *physical* body (of human beings) and those which govern the *social* body (of society). For her, the physical control and experience of the body is an expression of social control, and the physical experience of the body sustains a particular view of society. As Douglas further expresses it:



> There is a continual exchange of meanings between two kinds of bodily experience, so that each reinforces the categories of the other. As a result of this interaction the body itself is a highly restricted medium of expression (1982a:65).

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She is inviting us to discover specific parallels between social structure and all means of expression, whether verbal or non-verbal. It may be helpful to illustrate what Douglas means here by reference to just two concrete examples from her own studies.

Firstly, we refer to her studies of the particular phenomenon of *trance-states* among a variety of primitive cultures which include the Samburu, the Nuer, the Dinka and the !Kung Bushmen of the Nyae-Nyae region of the Kalahari desert. (1982a:74-79). Douglas expresses the comparison provided by her study of trance-states as follows:

> Where trance-states are not regarded as at all dangerous, but as a benign source of power and guidance for the community at large, I would expect to find a very loosely structured community, group boundaries unimportant, social categories undefined (1982a:79).

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We would, likewise expect that where trance-states are deemed dangerous, the community structures would be tighter, group boundaries more important, and social categories more refined.

Secondly, in her discussion "Do Dogs Laugh?" (1975:83-89), Douglas describes how the bodily act of *laughter* mediates something definite about a particular society, as distinct from something such as an uncontrolled frown or a giggle. The stronger the expression of laughter, the weaker the social controls on all bodily expression and vice versa. On the other hand, uncontrolled frowning probably indicates less tolerance for laughter and so becomes indicative of stronger controls over other forms of bodily and social expression. Therefore, whether a tribe laughs a lot or rarely has significance for understanding how the boundaries of acceptable or unacceptable, tolerated or untolerated behavior are determined in society as a whole. As Douglas expresses it:

> [I]t means that the level of social tensions has set low or high thresholds for bodily control. In the first case [for example], the full range of the body's power of expression is more readily available to respond fully to a small stimulus. If the general social control settings are slack, the thresholds of tolerance of bodily interruption will be set higher (Douglas 1975:87; 1975:213-214).

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It seems that Douglas' studies provide a *comparative model* within which to understand not only the place and function of trance-states and laughter in different cultures, but also the particular place and function of purity and pollution rules in any cultural system. As she observes,

> [t]he physical body is a microcosm of society, facing the centre of power, contracting and expanding its claims in direct accordance with the increase and relaxation of social pressures. Its members, now riveted into attention, now abandoned to their private devices, represent the members of society and their obligations to the whole (Douglas 1973:101).

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We must ask what the implications are of Douglas' hypothesis that "the physical body is a microcosm of society" within the framework of her broader understanding of purity-pollution systems and their functions in society? She would reply that knowledge of how an individual (or group) understands the workings of the body as a complex structure (its organization, spatial arrangement, and priority of needs) provides a way for guessing a great deal about the pattern of self-understanding in the society as a whole (its perception of its workings, its organization, its power structure and its cosmology). Stated differently, the human body is a *universal symbol system* (Isenberg and Owen 1977:3; cf.Douglas 1966:114-115; 1969:69-80).

The significance of *symbols* for Douglas is a crucial one, and receives more attention later.[8] At this stage we mention only how Douglas refines the structural analysis of symbols by Claude Levi-Strauss in order to address her own concern with role structure in society.

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Levi-Strauss is significant for Douglas insofar as he accepts that "the structuring of experience often comes about through a system of paired opposites: male /female, black /white, good /evil, purity /dirt". As for Levi-Strauss, so for Douglas, "these are the kinds of distinctions that let us know when we have encountered a symbolic boundary" (Wuthnow *et.al.* 1984:82; cf.Douglas 1982a:66-67). Consequently, Levi-Strauss's structuralism provides "a technique" for revealing particular structures in society.

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[8]Cf. 2.3.2.2.

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But Douglas has to refine his structural analysis to relate specifically to her own "hypothesis of role structure" in society (1982a:67). In this way she develops two arguments to describe the role of the body as a symbol within society as a whole. Firstly, "the drive to achieve consonance in all levels of experience produces concordance among the means of expression, so that the body is co-ordinated with the media". Secondly, "controls exerted from the social system place limits on the use of the body as medium" (Douglas 1982a:67). Through her more developed argument, Douglas provides us with an important hypothesis that represents an advance on previous work, viz.,

> the hypothesis that bodily control is an expression of social control- the abandonment of bodily control in ritual responds to the requirements of a social experience which is being expressed in advance. Furthermore, there is little prospect of successfully imposing bodily control without the corresponding social forms. And lastly, the same drive that seeks harmoniously to relate the experience of physical and social, must affect ideology. Consequently, when once the correspondence between bodily and social controls is traced, the basis will be laid for considering covarying attitudes in political thought and in theology (1982a:71).

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What Douglas discusses in terms of 'body' and 'society', then, has obvious implications for a comparative study of purity and pollution rules in different cultures. "Strong concern for purity implies one sort of social structure, less concern implies another" (Isenberg and Owen 1977:3). Or as Douglas herself expresses it:

> [A] social structure which requires a high degree of conscious control will find its style at a high level of formality, stern application of the purity rule, denigration of organic processes and wariness towards experiences in which control of consciousness is lost (1973:111; cf.1982a:81).

Again, we can understand that the reverse of what Douglas says also hold true.

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All that we have said to now in relation to the 'body' and 'society', lies at the heart of Douglas' criticism of compensation theory, and her choice of *replication* theory. As she herself explains the matter:

> Compensation theory treats the symbolic order as a secondary result of the social order, as purely expressive. A replication hypothesis, however, allows for the power of symbols generated in a particular social set-up to control it (1982a:xiv).

In other words, symbols established in one particular sphere of society (e.g. norms, values, rules) are effective not only for that sphere, but replicates and are able to be effectively applied to all other spheres of that society as well. This observation of Douglas is a very useful one, as many NT scholars have come to recognize (cf.Malina 1986:23-26).

We sum up the significant features of Douglas' discussion of "the two bodies" (the physical and the social). She has illustrated the value of replication theory for understanding the function of symbols in different societies. We see that the behavior of a particular individual or group, with respect to the physical body, (e.g. manner of eating or walking; kind of dress and adornments; expression of anger and humor; treatment of hair, whether shaggy or unkempt) becomes a sign of (i) how this individual or group responds to the social body, and of (ii) the tensions which exist between the physical and the social body (Douglas 1982a:64-81; cf.Isenberg and Owen 1977:3-4). We also obtain a glimpse into the place and power of symbolism in Douglas' anthropological schemes. In this case the body provides a basic scheme for all symbolism. The relevance of this for understanding the function of purity and pollution systems in society is underscored, for "[t]here is hardly any pollution which does not have some primary physiological

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reference" (Douglas 1966:163-164). Douglas has also provided the basis for her more developed discussion of the group and grid classification scheme.[9]

We shall now analyze Douglas' discussion of the place and function of the Pentateuchal purity rules in ancient Israelite culture as a second illustration of her understanding of purity-pollution systems.

2.3.2. The abominations of Leviticus

Douglas' provides an analysis of the Pentateuchal purity rules of ancient Israelite society, especially as these rules are described in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. In her analysis, she makes use of the cultural models she has developed mainly among the Lele tribe in the Congo (now, Zaire) region of Africa (cf.Douglas 1975:203-209). Isenberg and Owen (1977:4) caution us about the problem which emerges when models developed in still existing cultures (the Lele) are applied to more ancient cultures (the Israelites). Nevertheless, they affirm how "intriguing" Douglas' analysis of the dietary rules in Leviticus 11 are on a number of accounts, "not the least of which is that *she allows us to judge the universality of her model*" (1977:4, italics mine).

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In the discussion which follows, we appropriate what Isenberg and Owen typify as *four stages* which characterize Douglas' progressive analysis of the Pentateuchal purity rules of ancient Israelite society. They derive these four stages from their study of four of Douglas' works. The first of these studies is *Purity and Danger* (1966) where she addresses the particular *question of anomaly* in relation to the system of holiness in

[9]Cf. 2.4.

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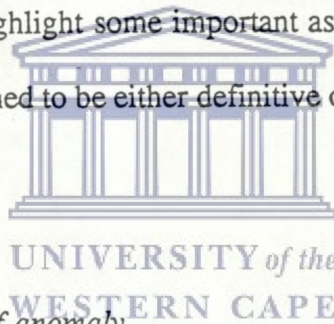
Israelite culture. The second study is *Natural Symbols* (1970)[10] in which Douglas draws specific attention to the place of *symbols* for appreciating the Pentateuchal purity rules. The third study is "Deciphering a Meal" (*Daedalus*, 1972) where she raises more clearly the notion of *analogy* between the specific Pentateuchal food rules and the whole purity system of the Israelites on the one hand, and between Israelite culture and non-Israelite cultures on the other. The fourth study is "Self-Evidence" (*Implicit Meanings*, 1975) in which Douglas refers explicitly to the religious *celebration of the anomalous* in particular cultures.

Our own description of Douglas' analysis of the Pentateuchal purity rules of ancient Israel attempts only to highlight some important aspects of her theory of culture and methodology. It is not designed to be either definitive or comprehensive of Douglas' broad-based analysis in this area.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2.3.2.1. *The question of anomaly*

In her study entitled "The Abominations of Leviticus" in *Purity and Danger* (1966), Douglas establishes an important *principle of classification* in her cultural anthropology. It is the need to interpret and understand particular rules of any culture within the framework of its cosmology as a whole. For our purposes, "cosmology" may be defined as the general principles on which the culture constructs its universe of

[10]Although we refer here to the 1st edition of Douglas' work, we use the 3rd edition for our descriptive analysis. Cf. 2.3.2.2. The 2nd edition which appeared in 1973 is also used by us in some parts of the thesis.

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meaning (cf.Douglas 1966:49). Therefore, in relation to the purity-pollution rules of Israelite culture we are required to see that

> [d]efilement is never an isolated event. It cannot occur except in view of a systematic ordering of ideas. Hence any piecemeal interpretation of the pollution rules of another culture is bound to fail. For the only way in which pollution ideas make sense is in reference to a total structure of thought whose keystone, boundaries, margins and internal lines are held in relation by rituals of separation" (1966:41).

Douglas rejects as unsatisfactory a number of traditional interpretations of the OT dietary rules. "All the interpretations given so far", she observes, "fall into two groups: either the rules are meaningless, arbitrary because their intent is disciplinary and not doctrinal, or they are allegories of virtues and vices" (1966:43; cf.43-48). In contrast, Douglas raises the important *question of anomaly* which is omitted by traditional views. She wants to know *why* Israelite religion "soaked up this foreign element but repelled that one", and not simply to represent this (or for that matter *any*) religion as merely acceptor or repellent of certain elements. For Douglas, then

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> [t]he only approach is to forget hygiene, aesthetics, morals and institutive revulsion, even to forget the Canaanites and Zoroastrian Magic, and start with the texts. Since each of the injunctions is prefaced by the command to be holy, so they must be explained by that command. There must be contrariness between holiness and abomination which will make overall sense of *all* the particular restrictions" (1966:49,italics mine).

What Douglas is striving for, consistent with her own methodology, is a *holistic* rather than piecemeal approach to culture. In addition to this she achieves "an originally non-moralizing, non-allegorizing classification" with which to interpret the OT texts (Isenberg and Owen 1977:4).

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By reference to a number of OT texts, Douglas proceeds to establish, firstly, the understanding of *holiness* in the Hebrew culture (e.g. Lev.11:41-44; 19:19; 21:17-21; 27:6-20; 28:23; Deut.20:5-7; 23:10:-15; 28:1-24). She discovers a threefold notion, namely that of *separateness, wholeness-completeness* and *unambiguous classifications* (Isenberg and Owen 1977:4; cf.Douglas 1966:49-55). Within this framework, Douglas maintains that the dietary rules of ancient Israel "develop the metaphor of holiness" in the culture as a whole (Douglas 1966:54).

Next, Douglas gives attention to the *pig* in Hebrew culture because it has been singled out as a special example of the anomalous. She wants to know *why* the pig is considered unclean (1966:55)? She finds unacceptable the traditional answers that the pig was inherently dirty, repulsive, a source of trichinoisis, gluttonous, or a rejected totem animal. For one thing, most of these interpretations go beyond the clear sense of what the biblical passages themselves appear to mean (Isenberg and Owen 1977:4; cf.Douglas 1966:55).

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What Douglas does, then, is to understand the Israelite response to the pig within the broader threefold classification scheme which unfolds in the creation narratives in Genesis. Here creation as a whole is divided into three classes, the land, the waters, and the air. Each class possesses its own defining categories which mark it off from the other classes. For example, on the *land*, four-legged animals hop, jump or walk, and those which do not comply, are anomalous to the class. In the *water*, anything which has fins and scales is acceptable, while those which do not are anomalous. In the *air*, two legged birds which fly with wings fit the class, and those which do not are excluded.

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Furthermore, the rules of each class attain cosmological significance. These rules are defined not only according to particular degrees of holiness, but also in terms of the place of everything created (Douglas 1966:55-56; cf.1972:71-75; 1975:283-285).[11] By this understanding, the pig is rejected essentially because it falls outside a pre-determined category of land animals which is defined as clean and acceptable for eating. The acceptable category is that of "cloven-hoofed, and cud-chewing ungulates" (Douglas 1966:54). While the pig is cloven-hoofed, it is not cud-chewing.[12]

The implication of Douglas' first excursus on why the pig is unclean leads us to see that it "is not out of place because it is dirty, but it is dirty because it is out of place" (Wuthnow *et.al.* 1984:92). What she observes in the case of the pig, is also applied in her observations regarding other animals mentioned in the dietary rules (1966:55-56). 'Cleanness' or 'uncleanness' for all species of animals, (whether on the land, in the water, or in the air) is defined in terms of whether or not they conform to their particular class. 'Clean' species include animals which fit the defining lines of their particular class, while 'unclean' species are those animals which contradict those lines.

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[11]Douglas provides a more detailed analysis of the three main classes of animals in her later discussion of table and altar rules (cf.1972:71-75; cf.2.3.2.3). Her discussion in the later work is vital for understanding purity-pollution rules which were applied in 1st century Judaism at the time of Jesus and with the emergence of early Christianity (cf.Malina 1981:122-154); cf. Part 3.

[12]Why this is the acceptable class of cattle for eating does not appear to be clarified by Douglas at this stage. She does accept the suggestion that such rules of acceptable and unacceptable are most likely *a posteriori* generalizations of pastoral habits which became characteristic of the ancient Israelites. In this situation, "cloven-hoofed, cud-chewing ungulates are the model of the proper kind of food for a pastoralist". Therefore, the pig, like the camel falls outside the acceptable class since it is cloven-hoofed, but does not ruminate (Douglas 1982a:54-55).

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In her study of OT dietary rules in *Purity and Danger*, Douglas has provided us with what she elsewhere describes as "a rational pattern for the Mosaic rejection of certain animal kinds" (1972:70). But more than that, she has clearly pointed to the deeper functionality of these dietary rules as cultural symbols of "power and danger" in Israelite society as a whole (cf.Douglas 1966:49). In terms of her replication hypothesis described earlier, the dietary rules function as symbols of those rules which apply at every other level of Israelite society. These rules define the acceptable boundary lines of *persons* (e.g. priests, Levites, true Israelites, Jewish proselytes, and Gentiles), *places* (e.g. in relation first to the court of tent, and later to the Temple), *times* (e.g. the Sabbath) and *things* (e.g. animals; Temple sacrifices).[13] Cautiously, Douglas summarizes the thrust of her interpretative analysis of "The Abominations of Leviticus":

> If the proposed interpretation of the forbidden animals is correct, the dietary laws would have been like signs which at every turn inspired meditation on the oneness, purity and completeness of God. By rules of avoidance holiness was given a physical expression in every encounter with the animal kingdom and at every meal. Observance of the dietary rules would thus have been a meaningful part of the great liturgical act of recognition and worship which culminated in the sacrifice in the Temple (1966:57).

We may sum up the important insight which emerges from the first stage of Douglas' analysis of the Pentateuchal purity rules in terms of the significance of *anomaly* in a particular culture. She has raised this issue to the foreground as a specifically religious concern which has potential for further development in terms of NT studies.[14]

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[13]Douglas says more about these classification schemes in "Deciphering a Meal" (1972:62-80). Cf. 2.3.2.3.

[14]Cf. 3.2.1.

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2.3.2.2. *Symbols, rituals and boundaries*

In *Natural Symbols* (1982a),[15] Douglas responds directly to critics of her chapter on the Pentateuchal dietary rules in *Purity and Danger* (1966). She admits that in the earlier study she overlooked "the importance of restrictive dietary rules in setting the Israelites apart from other people and expressing their sense of apartness" (1982a:38). Also she failed to explain satisfactorily why the pig came to be singled out for particular abhorrence in Israelite culture (Douglas 1982a:38).[16]

Douglas discovers a solution to these two problems (especially the second one) in two very different historico-cultural contexts. The first context is that of ancient Maccabean society, and the second that of the modern community of 'Bog Irish' Catholics. In her discussion in this regard, Douglas again addresses the whole notion of *symbols* and their function in different cultures.[17]

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In the context of Maccabean society, Douglas observes that it was the injunction of Antiochus IV Epiphanes which compelled Jews to sacrifice swine on the altars as a symbol of submission to him which provoked the strong Jewish rule concerning pork (cf.1 Macc.1:41-64; 2 Macc.6:4-5, etc.) The non-eating of pork became at this time "the critical symbol of group allegiance" (Douglas 1982a:39-41) and "a condensed symbol of

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[15]Cf. n.10.

[16]Douglas has taken seriously the protestations of Ralph Bulmer (1967:21) that her discussion of Hebrew cosmology in *Purity and Danger* (1966) focussed more on "an analysis of a system of ideas with no demonstration of its connection with the dominant concerns of the people who used it for thinking with" (Douglas 1975:207-208).

[17]Cf. 2.3.1.

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violation of *all* the laws [of Israel]" (cf.Isenberg and Owen 1977:4; Segal 1986:34-35). Up until the second century B.C.E. the pig had been treated as unclean, but in similar ways to other animals which did not fit what was considered the acceptable class.[18]

The faithful abstinence from meat on a Friday among "the Bog Irish" provides Douglas with the second clue as to why such a rule as the non-eating of pork gained prominence in Israelite religion (Douglas 1982a:37-53). Friday abstinence from meat became for these Catholics "the only ritual which brought Christian symbols down into the kitchen and larder and on to the dinner table". This ritual act illustrates the symbolic significance of the "Jewish rules of impurity" (Douglas 1982a:42). In the words of Douglas, "pork avoidance and Friday abstinence gain significance as symbols of allegiance simply by their lack of meaning for other cultures" (1982a:40).

Douglas' more developed comment on the dietary rules of the ancient Israelites and her reference to the ritual of Friday abstinence among the 'Bog Irish' Catholics reinforce her view that "a coherent symbolic system" is absolutely essential for the organization of any society. She states:

> There is no person whose life does not need to unfold in a coherent symbolic system. The less organised the way of life, the less articulated the symbolic system may be...it is an illusion to suppose that there can be organisation, without symbolic expression... The drawing of symbolic lines and boundaries is a way of bringing order into experience. Such non-verbal symbols (as ritual; magic; impurity rules) are capable of creating a structure of meanings in which individuals can relate to one another and realise their own ultimate purposes (Douglas 1982a:50-51).(Douglas 1982a:50).

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[18]We are not to understand by this that the pig lacked symbolic significance at an earlier period of Israelite history. For this it clearly had together with other animals (cf.2.3.2.1.), but not with the singularity of focus that it acquired during the time of the Maccabean Revolt.

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For Douglas, then, symbolic boundaries signify in negative fashion the exclusion of that which does not fit a particular socio-cultural system. They also function positively, providing a sense of ordered existence and the basis for understanding the ultimate meaning of this existence for the individual and the group in a particular society. Furthermore, symbolic boundaries generate "feelings of awe, danger, and potency" in society, and in this way reveal a vital insight into the social aspects of purity and pollution (Wuthnow *et.al.*1984:97).

Douglas develops the notion of the fear, the danger and the power which symbolic boundaries generates elsewhere in her reference to Arnold van Gennep's metaphor of society (Douglas 1968:340; Van Gennep 1960). As she explains, for Van Gennep society is "a kind of house divided into rooms and corridors, the compartments carefully isolated and the passages between them protected by ceremonial" (Douglas 1968:340). However, Douglas expands Van Gennep's ideas in order to explain how power resides in "not only marginal social states" but also in the well structured social system as a whole (Douglas 1968:304; Wuthnow *et.al.*1984:97).[19]

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The important insight derived from the second stage of Douglas' analysis of the Pentateuchal purity rules is that *symbols* and symbolic actions (*rituals*) are often the "only means of communication" in particular cultures. Furthermore, the "structure of symbols" express something meaningful and relevant about the particular culture as a whole. Finally, *symbolic boundaries* establish what is to be included in or excluded from

[19] Cf. 2.3.1.

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a particular society. In other words, these symbolic boundaries generate the fear, danger and power that bring cohesion in that society (cf.Douglas 1966:94-139).

2.3.2.3. *The principle of analogy*

In her maturer reflections on the Israelite food laws in "Deciphering a Meal" (1972), Douglas confronts a problem not dealt with in her earlier works. Isenberg and Owen express it as follows:

> What was the social structure of that community for whom the [dietary] rules were propounded? How did animal classification relate to other systems of classification within the society (Isenberg and Owen 1977:5)?

By confronting this problem, Douglas' aim is "to reach beyond the classification of animal kinds to the social and political preoccupations of the Jewish people themselves (1975:208). In order to address the problem, she uses a case study based on food codes. She asks: "If food is a code, where is the precoded message" (1972:61)? Her basic assumption is that the food code is "a microscale society", and "the message it encodes will be found in the patterns of social relations being expressed" (Douglas 1972:61; cf.1982b:82-124). She describes more clearly what the message of the food code is:

> The message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion, and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across the boundaries. Like sex, the taking of food has a social component, as well as a biological one. Food categories therefore encode social events (1972:61).

Consistent with her methodology, Douglas begins her analysis by focussing on a particular social event in everyday life, viz., the category of the meal in her own home. She wants to know "what defines the category of a meal in our home?" and "why those

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particular categories and not others are employed (1972:62)?" Her analysis follows a series of steps.

In the first step, Douglas contrasts *daily* meals with drinks. She accepts that meals express more complex, structured social events than do drinks. Consequently, meals demonstrate well "the line between intimacy and distance" in the social system (1972:65-67). Their meaning is evidenced not only in the "external boundaries" which separates a 'meal' from a 'drink', but also in the "internal structuring" expressed cognitively within the family system (Douglas 1972:67).

Next, Douglas considers the line between *weekday* meals on the one hand, and *Sunday* meals and other special meals celebrated throughout the year on the other. In this part of her analysis, she derives the important principle that

> [a] meal stays in the category of meal only insofar as it carries this structure which allows the part to recall the whole (1972:67).

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This principle becomes significant, especially when we seek to know what constitutes "the minimum structure of a meal" in *any* culture. The meal must be understood within the framework of the whole social system (1972:68).

In the third step of her study, Douglas confirms her earlier point that meal coding is a useful symbolic indicator of a broader social relation or universe of meaning. She sums up the essence of her conclusions at this stage:

> [T]he meaning of a meal is found in a system of repeated analogies...The cognitive energy which demands that a meal look like a meal and not like a drink is performing in the culinary medium the same exercise that it performs in language. First, it distinguishes order, bounds it, and separates it from disorder. Second, it uses economy in the means of expression by allowing only a limited number of structures. Third, it imposes a rank scale upon the repetition of structures. Fourth, the repeated formal analogies multiply the meanings that are

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> carried down any of them by the power of the most weighty. By these four methods the meanings are enriched. There is no single point in the rank scale, high or low, which provides the basic meaning or real meaning. Each exemplar has the meaning of its structure realized in the examples at other levels (1972:69-70).

In the fourth step, Douglas applies her analysis of the meal in the home directly to the meal governed by the dietary rules in ancient Israel (1972:71-74). Here she builds on her foundational discussion with regard to the classification of animals in her earlier studies. She accepts that "anomalous creatures are unfit for altar and table" (1972:74; cf.1966:41-57). But in "Deciphering a Meal" her analysis is more sophisticated. She uses examples from other cultures in New Guinea and Thailand where she discovers that rules regarding what animals are permissible to be eaten are patterned like those rules pertaining to what persons are permissible to be married. "Sexual and gastronomic consummation are made equivalents of one another by reasons of analogous restrictions applied to each" (Douglas 1972:71; cf.Isenberg and Owen 1977:5). When Douglas applies a similar analysis to ancient Israelite society, however, she does not find any evidence that an analogy between sex and eating exists here as it does among the New Guinea and Thai cultures.[20]

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Yet Douglas is able to declare that an important *principle of analogy* exists between Israelite society and non-Israelite society, viz.,

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[20]Douglas states that one looks in vain in Leviticus to find an analogy between eating and sex. Present only is "a strong analogy between table and altar". She suggests a reason. Unlike the Thai and New Guinea situations, the Israelites would not have required an association between sex and food. "They had no rule requiring them to exchange their womenfolk" as was evident among the other two cultures (Douglas 1972:71). For a possible alternative view, see Countryman 1988:20-39.

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> [t]he analogy by which Israelites are to other humans as their livestock are to other quadruplets develops by indefinite stages the analogy between altar and table (1972:75).

Her examination of analogy, which supports her theory of replication (cf.1972:71-75), reveals significant aspects of ancient Israelite culture. In particular, 'analogy' reveals the nature of Israelite food laws in relation to their purity-pollution system as a whole. As she herself describes it:

> The analogy between humans and animals is very clear. So is the analogy created by those rules between the temple and the living body. Further analogies appear between the classification of animals according to holiness (fig.2 1972: 72) and the rules which set up the analogy of the holy temple with its holier and holier inner sanctuaries, on the other hand between the temple's holiness and the body's purity and the capacity of each to be defiled by the self-same forms of impurity (1972:75-76).

In short, then, Douglas' analysis of food categories in the home, of table and altar rules, of relations between the Temple and the physical body, demonstrate "metonymical patternings...too obvious to ignore. At every moment they are in chorus with the message about the value of purity and the rejection of impurity" (1972:76).[21]

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At this stage of her study, Douglas returns to the question raised in *Purity and Danger* (1966:55) regarding why the pig became so abhorrent to the Jews. She provides a fuller answer in light of her "maturer reflections" in "Deciphering a Meal". The pig must be seen as carrying "the odium of multiple pollution". It not only pollutes because it "defies the classification of the ungulates", but also because "it eats carrion" and "it is

[21]The implications of this kind of analogy for NT studies (e.g. for the understanding of the Lord's supper) is alluded to by Douglas (1972:76). In Part 3 we shall see how Malina adapts Douglas' insights to understand the Jewish purity system at the time of Jesus and Paul. We must also note that Douglas is aware that her views on analogy and replication may be reductionistic. We address this problem in Part 4.

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reared as food by non-Israelites" (1972:79). Douglas substantiates her view by an extended analogy between food rules and other rules against mixtures (1979:79; Lev.18:23; 19:19).

In the fifth and final step of her analysis in "Deciphering a Meal", Douglas examines why, despite the fact that so much has been forgotten about the rules of purification and their meaning in ancient Israelite religion, "the three rules governing the Jewish meal have persisted", viz. (i) the rejection of particular kinds of animals as unfit for the table (Lev.11), (ii) the separation of the edible kinds of meat from the blood before it is cooked (Lev.17:10), and (iii) the total separation of milk from meat involving the most specialized attention being given to utensils (Ex.23:19; 34: 26; Deut. 14:21) (Douglas 1972:79; cf.1972:71). She asks "what meanings do they [the rules of the Jewish meal] still encode, unmoored as they partly are from their original social context" (1972:79)? Douglas finds the answer to this question in the fact that purity rules in ancient Israelite society invariably relate to the whole arena of maintaining *boundaries and categories* in society.[22] In this context, the Jewish meal represents "more than a negative barrier of exclusion". Rather, it "bounds the area of structured relations. Within that area rules apply. Outside of it, anything goes" (Douglas 1972:79). Therefore, Douglas is able to safely conclude where she first began in her analysis of the meal as a food code:

> Following the argument we have established by which each level of meaning realizes the others which share a common structure, we can fairly

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[22]Cf. 2.3.2.2.

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say that the ordered system which is a meal represents all the ordered systems associated with it" (1972:79-80).

The important insight which may be drawn from the third stage of Douglas' analysis of the Pentateuchal purity rules, therefore, is the *principle of analogy*. Through analogy *one* cultural expression can be related to the *whole* expression of that particular culture. This insight has significance on at least two levels. Firstly, it helps us to understand how particular elements of any culture relate to or express the cultural system as a whole. Secondly, it raises interesting questions about power and danger associated with either the adherence to or the deviation from a particular cultural expression in any society.

2.3.2.4. *The celebration of the anomalous*

In her chapter, "Self Evidence" published in *Implicit Meanings* (1975), Douglas raises the further question regarding the particular *social context* of the purity rules in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. She begins with her earlier thesis that "the meaning of clean and unclean only gets its full resonance when the classification of the whole universe is complete" (Douglas 1975:284). But Douglas is self-critical of some overgeneralizations in her theorizing in *Purity and Danger (1966)* and "Deciphering a Meal" (1972). Here she "supposed that the Hebrew response of rejecting anomaly was the *normal* one" (Douglas 1975:284-285). For her, the earlier supposition remains "a too facile solution" (Douglas 1975:285). She explains why she reaches this conclusion.

> I failed [then] to exploit the full intent of the contrast between my fieldwork on the Congo and my research on the Bible. For the Lele, many anomalies are auspicious and they religiously celebrate the most anomalous

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> of all, which carries defining marks of land and water creatures, humans and animals, the pangolin or 'scaly ant-eater'" (Douglas 1975:285, italics mine; cf.285-287).

Douglas' reference to the celebration of the anomalous pangolin in Lele culture illustrates how "dirt-rejecting" elements in a culture may also be transformed through ritual into those which are "dirt-affirming". In other words, "[t]hat which is rejected [as dangerous or forbidden] is ploughed back for a renewal of life" (1966:167; cf.164-170). Furthermore, the pangolin cult of the Lele people represents, for Douglas, only one example among many other cults which encourage their members to reject the notion that cultural categories are static and absolute systems. Rather, such categories may be recognized "for the fictive, man-made, arbitrary creations that they are" (Douglas 1982a:169-170).

Yet Douglas does not develop this idea of the celebration of the anomalous in her specific discussion of the Pentateuchal purity rules. Rather, she affirms what remains the critical criterion of her purity-pollution classification system, whether for the abominable pig in ancient Israelite culture or the revered pangolin in Lele culture of the Congo Central Highlands or the cassowary in Karam culture of the New Guinea Highlands:

> Foul monster or good saviour, the judgment has little to do with the physical attributes of the being in question and much to do with the prevailing social system of rules and meanings which creates anomaly (Douglas 1975:285).

By this criterion, Douglas clearly reveals, firstly, her own indebtedness to the Durkheimian idea, viz., "that the properties of classification systems derive from and are indeed properties of the social systems in which they are used" (1975:296). It follows that irrespective of the differences which exist among the cosmological schemes of Lele,

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Karam, and Israelite cultures, the significance of purity and pollution rules and of boundary crossing and order are of vital importance in each culture (Douglas 1975:307; cf.1975: 304-307).

But secondly, Douglas is also able to strengthen her understanding of Israelite culture, particularly the *social context* in which the dietary rules of Lev.11 and Deut.14 originated. She places these biblical laws in the context of the P-document which emerged in the sixth century B.C.E. and in this way rejects the notion that the laws were part of "an earlier, undigestible remnant" (cf.Isenberg and Owen 1977:5).[23]

Douglas continues:

> It suits my thesis well that small groups of learned exiles in Babylon, conscious of their unique historic mission, and conscious of the need to separate theirs from the culture of their conquerors should have elaborated detailed rules of purity. Nowhere else in the world has such logic-chopping consistency been excelled (1975: 307).

The important insight which emerges from the fourth stage of Douglas' analysis of the Pentateuchal purity rules, therefore, is the potential of the *celebration of the anomalous* in a particular culture. Douglas does not express the significance of this for ancient Israelite culture. However, her explicit allusions to how the celebration of the most anomalous functions in other cultures (e.g. the Lele and Karam) also raise interesting possibilities of how similar celebrations may have functioned in early Christian culture, both during and after the lifetime of Jesus of Nazareth.

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[23]Douglas appears to agree here with the dominant consensus of OT scholarship today (e.g.Gottwald 1985).

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2.3.3. Concluding summary

We conclude our discussion of Douglas' analysis of purity and pollution systems by highlighting five significant insights of her work which suggest its value for NT studies. *Firstly*, Douglas demonstrates how the Israelites, as creators of their own social universe of meaning and order, had purity rules, whether for table, bed, or altar, which to them were "self-evidently true" (1975:313).

Secondly, Douglas mounts a persuasive argument that we "move away from considering isolated categories and their application to particular series of events" and instead consider these within "the total universe in which the categories are based...remembering that each usage has implications for the rest of the system" (1975: 313). *Thirdly*, Douglas affords us the opportunity to understand and evaluate her anthropology from within the critical tradition of biblical scholarship. For she accepts that anthropology, like biblical studies, is a discipline that undergoes *dynamic development* through time and is itself subject to the rigors of literary and historical analysis.

Fourthly, we are able to appreciate more concretely what are some important cultural concepts in Douglas' anthropology. This will provide us with a firmer foundation with which to assess the appropriation of Douglas' work by NT scholars such as Bruce Malina.

Fifthly, in her developed study of "The Abominations of Leviticus", Douglas also provides us with a useful and interesting case-study of purity and pollution systems which may be taken up by NT scholarship.

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2.4. The Group And Grid Categorical Scheme

2.4.1. The struggle for a comparative model

Without doubt, Mary Douglas' categorical scheme or matrix of *group* and *grid* represents her most ambitious and important theoretical contribution in the field of cultural anthropology. The group-grid scheme emerged from what she describes as many years of struggle to develop a model that makes effective cross-cultural comparisons possible within anthropology (Douglas 1978:15). This struggle has born fruit through a process of increased understanding which unfolds most significantly in her earlier work, *Natural Symbols* (1970; 1st ed.) and her relatively later work, *Cultural Bias* (1978). Both these works receive primary attention as we attempt to define and describe the theoretical concepts of group and grid in Douglas' work. Such attempts are often not as simple to comprehend as they might first suggest.[24]

In her study of several and divergent social and symbolic systems, Douglas is most concerned to meet the challenge so neglected and often ignored in anthropology, viz.,

> to find *principles of social organization* which are abstract enough to be applied cross-culturally while maintaining contact with concrete human experience (Isenberg and Owen 1977:6, italics mine).

Yet Douglas' concern is not only with principles of social organization. There is a broader challenge which confronts her in her attempt to develop a useful model for cross-cultural analysis. She must find "a *method* for correlating particular cosmologies

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[24]We are aware that in order to appreciate the richness and often attendant complexities and nuances of Douglas' group-grid analysis we require a deeper understanding of cultural/social anthropology than we currently possess. Therefore, we do not presume that our own analysis of Douglas' group-grid scheme is in any way either definitive or comprehensive.

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with social organizations and a *means* for being responsive to change at both the social and symbolic levels" (Isenberg and Owen 1977:5, italics mine). Beside the principles of social organization, two other factors assume key importance for Douglas. The one is *cosmology* and the other the *dynamics of social change*.

To sum up, then, the group-grid assumes the character of a model for Douglas in which she wishes to understand (i) how societies are structurally organized (social organization), (ii) how societies perceive the construction and function of their universe or world (cosmology) and (iii) how societies undergo change in different ways at the social and symbolic levels (dynamics of social change).

Clearly, Douglas is not only concerned with social and symbolic boundaries which was our focus when we discussed her understanding of purity and pollution systems, although, what we discussed there is fundamental to an understanding of her entire group-grid scheme. More specifically, her categories of group and grid are sophisticated attempts

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> to describe whole societies and whole cosmologies in terms of the nature and clarity of various combinations of external and internal lines of demarcation (Wuthnow *et.al.* 1984:78).[25]

In her discussion of *whole* societies or cosmologies, however, Douglas is concerned not to exclude the indispensable place of the *individual*. As she herself expresses it in her reference to the nature of the larger social unit of the group:

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[25]In other words, whereas the earlier discussion of Douglas treated purity and pollution systems in a seemingly more static way in order to clarify its essential character, her discussion of group and grid reflects more dynamically how a combination of factors in society affect the drawing of boundary lines.

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> A group is not taken to be formed, solid, existing independently of the volition of its constituent members. Their investment of time and energy quickens its life and marks its boundaries. Once they withdraw their commitment, it dissolves away (Douglas 1978:13).

2.4.2. Matters of definition[26]

It may be helpful to grasp something of the bigger picture of Douglas' group-grid categorical scheme before we move on to describe in more detail some of its specific features.

Douglas utilizes the polarizing concepts of sociology between 'individualism' on the one hand and 'group behavior' on the other in order to describe the overall dimensions of 'group' and 'grid'. As she states:

> I use 'grid' for a dimension of individuation, and 'group' for a dimension of social incorporation (1978:7).[27]

In her group-grid scheme, Douglas begins with an attempt to situate the individual within the broader social context of group, but without implying in mechanical fashion that the individual's environment is merely the product of group environment (Douglas

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[26]Douglas' development of the two variables of group and grid owes a primary debt to the work of psycho-linguist Basil Bernstein. Among other things, Bernstein suggested in his study of language in society that an overlap of two important speech codes occurs, viz.,the restricted code and the elaborated code (Douglas 1982a:54-64; cf.Bernstein 1975:125-130; 170-189; Isenberg and Owen 1977:6). Our aim here is not to describe Bernstein's work, but only to mention one (though there are more) of its values for Douglas. Bernstein's methodology shifts away from treating "language as an autonomous cultural agent", but rather relates it in its "formal patterns to the structure of social relations". She too understands culture in terms of symbolic and social relations in which meanings are reflected in the context of these relations (Douglas 1982a:21-22).

[27]As Douglas herself acknowledges, she is exploring the terrain which represents a strong link between anthropological and sociological concerns (cf.1978:6-7). Such a venture itself has potential for social science approaches to the NT. Cf.1.3. and Part 3.

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1978:7-8). Indeed, as we shall soon discover, the more complex *interaction* of the group and the individual is at the heart of the group-grid categorical scheme. At this stage, we mention only what she describes as vital to her specific methodology in group and grid analysis:

> Group-grid analysis treats the experiencing subject as a subject choosing. It does not suppose that the choices are pre-determined, though costs may be high and some of the parameters may be fixed. The method allows for the cumulative effect of individual choices on the social situation itself: both can interact, the individual and the environment, and either can move because the environment is defined to consist of all the other interacting individuals and their choices (1978:13).

Our first example to illustrate the basic character of the group-grid scheme is Douglas' reference to the *family* as a social unit. She writes:

> To the extent that the fàmily is a bounded unit, contained in a set of rooms, known by a common name, sharing a common interest in some property, it is a group, however emphemeral...[and] to the extent that roles within it are allocated on principles of sex, age, and seniority, there is a grid controlling the flow of behaviour (1982a:57).

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In light of the bigger picture of Douglas' group-grid scheme just provided, we move now towards a more precise definition of 'group' and 'grid'. In order to illustrate, firstly, what Douglas means by 'group', we extend her example of the family to embrace small-scale primitive societies. We focus exclusively on the issue of group allegiances, and experiences of inclusion and exclusion (1982:57). In these societies, the dimension of 'group' may be expressed in degrees of intensity along a horizontal scale or continuum, from minimum (-) to maximum (+) levels (cf.Fig.1).

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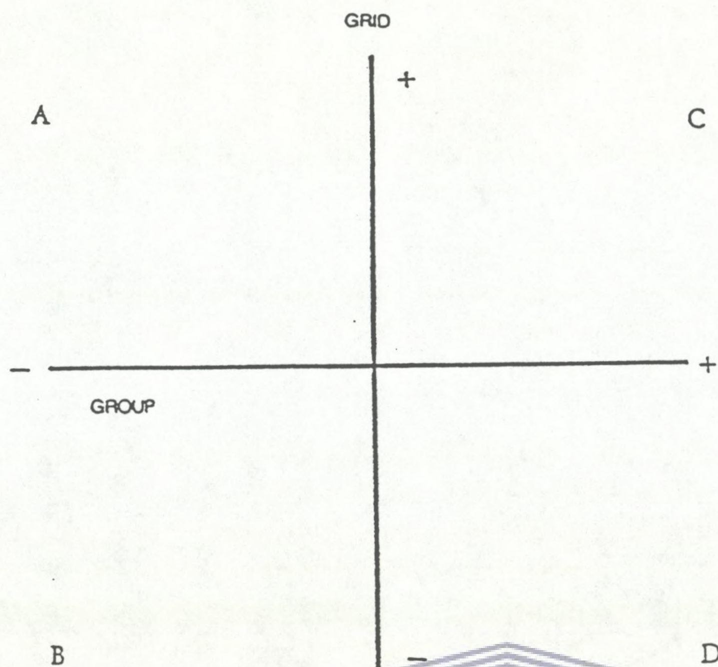

Fig.1. *The Group-Grid categorical scheme of Douglas*
(Adapted from Douglas 1982a:59)

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Fig.1 expresses the possible range of 'group' from the lowest levels of associations (those which are more open) to the highest levels of associations (those which are more tightly knit and closed). More open associations are indicative of those which are more temporary, while associations which are closed represent those which are more permanent. The character of 'group' is essentially centered around varying concerns of corporate identity and some recognizable signs of inclusion or exclusion. The further we move along the line from left to right, the more clearly bounded and permanent are the social groups.

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We may now better understand Douglas' own definition of 'group'. *Group* is defined in terms of

> the claims it makes over its constituent members, the boundary it draws around them, the rights it confers on them to use its name and other protections, and the levies and constraints it applies (Douglas 1978:7-8).

Essentially, then, 'group' lays stress on external boundaries which clearly set apart a particular group from another; it designates the degree of social pressure which is exerted on an individual to conform to the demands of the group; it expresses the degree to which individuals are embedded in other individuals; and it stresses what the costs involved are by any non-conformity to group demands on the part of the individual members. The 'group', then, is a definite environmental context in which to understand the environment of the individual (cf.Isenberg and Owen 1977:6; Malina 1986:13).

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Yet, there is still the need to illuminate what Douglas terms the "invisible background" and "the external side-effects of individual interaction" in terms of those which create the most (and least) constraint upon individual behavior (1978:8). It is here that Douglas speaks of 'grid'. She admits that 'grid' is a much more difficult concept to define than 'group' (1978:16). And it may be that a deeper grasp of its character will only be possible once we describe how 'grid' functions within the framework of the whole group-grid scheme itself. Douglas provides us with initial help when she articulates the main intention behind 'grid' which is

> to establish a dimension on which the social environment can be rated according to how much it *classifies* the individual person, leaving minimum scope for personal choice, providing instead a set of railway lines with remote-control of points for interaction (1978:16, italics mine; cf.Isenberg 1980:34).

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We use Douglas' description of "ego-centred categories of behaviour" to illustrate how an individual's life is organized in terms of 'grid' (1982a:58-59). By this she means those societies where strong group organization is centered in a central leader or individual who in differing ways determines the character of the group.[28] She finds her examples of such societies among the Ifugaos and Kalingas of the Philippines, the ancient Anglo-Saxons, the Beowulfs, and some societies in New Guinea. Each of these societies reflect how variations in 'grid' features occur almost independent of 'group'. The prominence of the 'grid' (individual) factor does not exclude the impact of the 'group' factor, however.[29]

In these "ego-centred" societies 'grid' may be expressed in terms of a vertical scale or continuum, from minimum (-) to maximum (+) levels (cf.Fig.1). The frame of analysis provided is one which expresses the possible range of structure and organization in social relations in which the individual finds her/himself. Because of the factor of 'group' which is still present, however slight or non-existent its influence might be on the individual, we must proceed more cautiously in explaining the nature of 'grid' features

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[28]We recognize that Douglas' discussion of "ego-centred categories of behaviour", in order to illustrate the meaning of 'grid', has its problems. For in wishing to emphasize the particular role of 'the leader', she is drawing in another variable which inevitably includes the dimension of 'group' and its place in determining boundary lines and roles, even in 'ego-centered' societies. Douglas, of course, includes both 'group' and 'grid' in her discussion here, but the 'grid' feature is primary. Because Douglas sees "ego-centred" societies as possessing temporality, that is, having boundary lines drawn around the leader mainly while s/he is alive, she feels justified in laying stress on individual roles and behavior above the variable of 'group' in this illustration.

[29]Cf. n.28.

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along the vertical scale. We use the alphabet letters **A**, **B**, **C**, and **D** as they appear in Fig.1 to designate the character of the different 'grid' features.

At **A** (weak group/high grid) the individual belongs to no organized or structured group. But constraint is placed on her/his relationships with other people by categories of behavior defined with reference to her/himself. At **B** (weak group/low grid) the individual is bound neither by group nor grid. There is greater freedom from social constraints. Conventions are less important and relationships with other people are optional. At **C** (strong group/high grid) social relations are more structured and organized. The individual is involved with other people and her/his role is more clearly defined. At **D** (strong group/low grid) all statuses are insignificant in comparison to the one status of belonging to and being involved with a defined group.

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In addition to the above explanatory comments, we offer Douglas' definition of 'grid'. *Grid* suggests:

> the cross-hatch of rules to which individuals are subject in the course of their interactions. As a dimension, it shows a progressive change in the mode of control. At the strong end there are visible rules about space and time related to social roles; at the other end...the formal classifications fade, and finally vanish (Douglas 1978:8).

Essentially, then, grid lays stress in its broader sense (i.e. not confined only to "ego-centred categories of behaviour") on the internal boundaries and roles which give order to and express the shared systems of self- understanding of individual members of a particular group; it designates the degree to which the behavior of individuals is socially constrained by symbol systems of classification which provide intelligibility to their experiences in society; and importantly, it defines the degree of 'fit' or match

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between individual experiences and those commonly shared values of the larger group (cf.Isenberg and Owen 1977:6; Malina 1986:13).

The above descriptions of "ego-centered" societies may be further used, but in another way. Douglas uses it, now, to emphasize how each variable of 'group' *and* 'grid' is represented in terms of how each extends in different directions along a continuum from the lowest (minimum) to the highest (maximum) levels possible (1982a:60; cf.Fig.2).

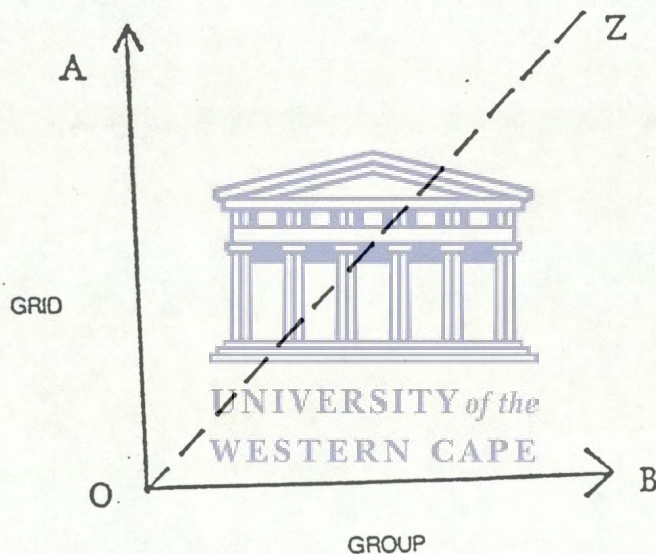

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Fig.2. *The Group-Grid categorical scheme, reflecting the relationship between group organization and individualism* (Adapted from Douglas 1982a:60)

In Fig.2 we observe a horizontal movement towards weaker or stronger intensity of group organization (**OB**), and a vertical movement towards lower or higher intensity of individualism (**OA**). The result of increased movement along **OB** indicates the imposition of stronger "group-focussed roles upon its members: stratification, leadership and sub-groupings will develop". Increased movement along **OA** indicates higher degrees of

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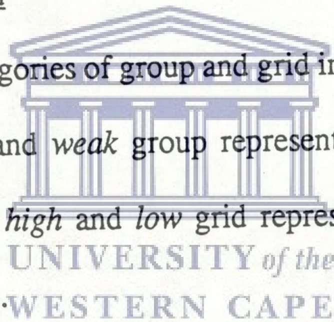
ego-centered behavior, and the consequent lowering of group restraints on the individual. **Z** represents the movement towards the highest degree of individualism within the system of formal social interaction. Nearer **O**, the minimum levels of both group and grid are represented, that is, the least structured organization (group) and the greatest degree of individual freedom (grid).

We are now at the stage to present in more detail, Douglas' description of the broader defining features of group and grid.

2.4.3. Features of Group and Grid

Douglas explicates her categories of group and grid in terms of a more descriptive framework, viz., that of *strong* and *weak* group represented along a horizontal scale continuum on the one hand, and *high* and *low* grid represented along a vertical scale continuum on the other (cf.Fig.3).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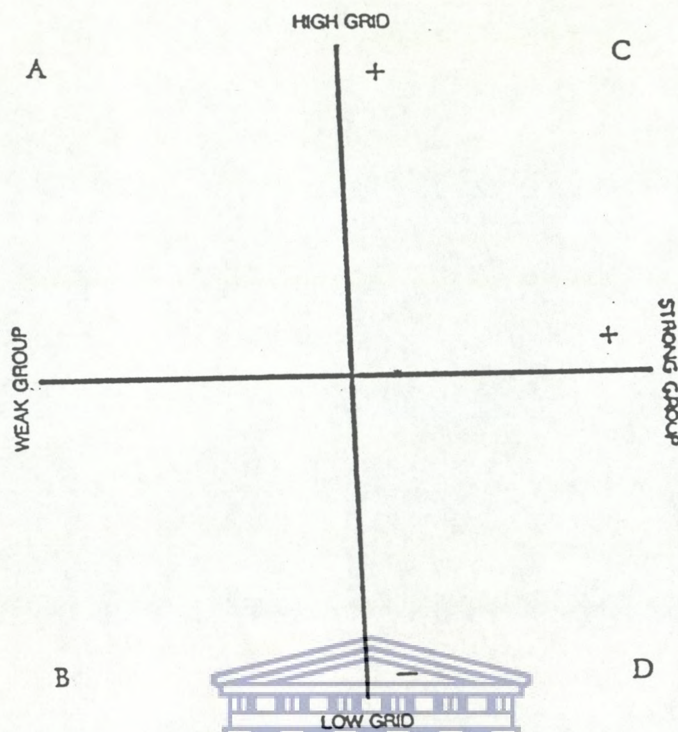

Fig.3. *The relationship between Strong and Weak Group, and High and Low Grid.* (Adapted from Douglas 1982a:59)

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Strong group indicates the presence of strong pressure exerted on the individual to conform to group norms. Symbolic and social boundaries will be more narrowly defined and more prescriptive of social identity. That is, whether the individual is inside or outside the larger group will be more readily determined. Consequently, the cost of non-conformity to the group will be greater for the individual, usually meaning exclusion from the larger group.

Weak group indicates the reverse, viz., the presence of weak pressure to conform; symbolic and social boundaries will be more loosely defined and less prescriptive of social identity; the lines between 'inside' and 'outside' will be less clear; and the cost of non-conformity less serious and even non-existent.

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High grid lays stress on more intense internal order and shared understanding within the particular social group. Individuals will reflect greater constraint in behavior, evidenced in stronger adherence to the given system of classifications. The individual will perceive greater 'fit' between her/his experiences, values and conceptions of reality and those of the larger group.

Low grid, in contrary fashion, indicates a weak internal order with a lack of shared understanding within the particular group and their will be the presence of weaker socially constrained behavior or even its absence, attested to in the low degree of adherence to the given classification system. The individual will experience less 'fit' between her/his experiences, values and conceptions of reality and that of the larger group.

In *Cultural Bias* (1978:19-21), Douglas describes in more dynamic fashion the relationship between the combinations of group and grid just described. The result is four quadrants on the group-grid matrix, each quadrant reflecting *four main types of social environments* and *cosmologies* which emerge in societies across the world (cf.Fig.4). The four social types are (i) **Strong group /Low Grid (D)**, (ii) **Strong group /High Grid (C)**, (iii) **Weak Group /High Grid (B)**, (iv) **Weak Group /Low Grid (A).**

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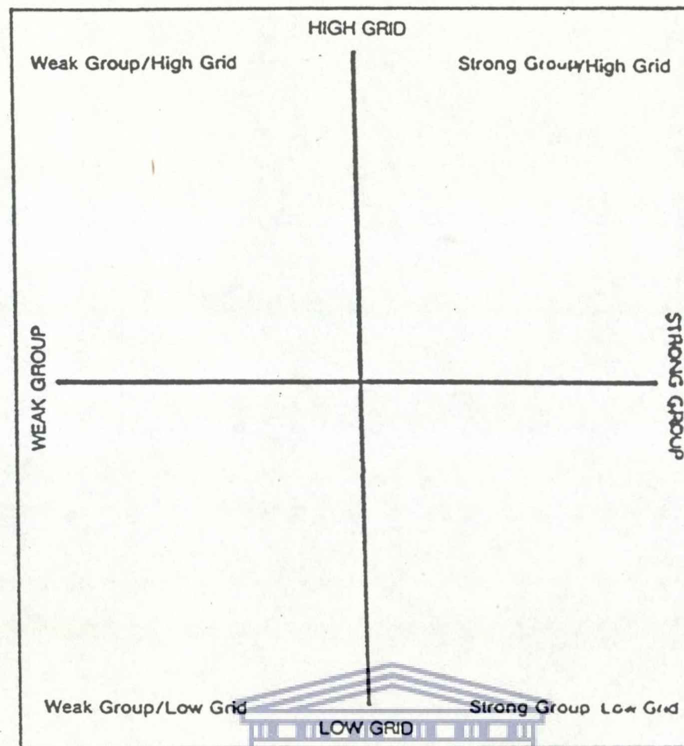

Fig.4. *The dynamic relationship between Group and Grid* (Adapted from Douglas 1978:19-21)

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It is vital to recognize that each quadrant represents only the *generalized type* of the particular social environment and social organization together with its accompanying cosmology (Douglas 1978:19; cf.Isenberg and Owen 1977:7-8; Malina 1986:16). The four typologies, therefore, are no more than Douglas' attempt to 'fit' some important common or general features of different societies (primitive and modern) within the framework of the group-grid categorical scheme. In keeping with her aim to develop her cross-cultural model of analysis, the cultural features which she identifies in each social type are essentially *abstractions* and reflect only what are similar in each main type.

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In short, Douglas' group-grid categorical scheme provides us with *polythetic typologies*. As Bailey states,

> [a] polythetic typology is constructed by grouping together those individuals within a particular sample which have the greatest number of shared features (Bailey 1973:21; cf.Douglas 1978:15).

This means that any given social group may not need to evidence every feature of a particular quadrant to be located there. The given group need only demonstrate some of the main features of a particular quadrant, while not contradicting the other remaining ones (cf.Malina 1986:29). Consequently, a range of *specific* possibilities are envisaged for any group which may be located in a particular quadrant. For example, a group located in quadrant **D** (strong group/low grid) may share the general features of all groups in this quadrant, yet possess unique features which place it at higher or lower points of group and grid respectively. The same will be true for other quadrants as well. We should also recognize that precisely because the features identified in each social type are abstractions, they will not be found in any society in quite the same terms as Douglas' descriptions may suggest (cf.1978:19-21). Finally, because the factor of *change* (or its possibility) is built into the group-grid scheme, Douglas reminds us that "there is no reason to expect sudden breaks in continuity from one context and its supporting cosmology, to another" (1978:19). This last mentioned factor is vital for understanding how and why individuals or sub-groups in a particular social environment are able to move to another.[30]

[30]Cf. 3.2.2.2. and 3.2.2.3.

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We sum up our discussion of Douglas' group-grid categorical scheme at this point. She has suggested four main social types or contexts within which to locate different societies across the world. Each social type possesses its own distinctive cultural features which are inseparably linked to its own particular type of cosmology. We also note one additional aspect of Douglas' analysis in *Cultural Bias* (1978). Beside the overall group and individual features which she identifies within each social type (1978:19-21), she also describes further elements of cosmology which are not reflected in the framework of her earlier general descriptions. These cosmological derivatives or elements are divided into four main schemes: (i) views of nature (ii) views of time (iii) views of human nature (iv) views of social behavior (Douglas 1978:22-40). Each of these cosmological elements, which are singled out by Douglas for analysis within the general framework of her group-grid scheme, reflects many of her mundane anthropological concerns first mentioned when we began our study of her work.[31]

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We now attempt to give more concrete and visual expression to our earlier descriptions of Douglas' group-grid scheme. In order to do this, we shall use two more diagrams. Each diagram reflects how particular 'cultural scripts' or 'script features' are expressed within the different quadrants or social types which the group-grid scheme provides (Malina 1986:20-27).

[31]Cf. 2.2. Douglas insists that these additional cosmological categories and elements are in "a conditional, provisional tense, dependent on empirical testing which is not yet done" (1978:22). Malina has suggested in more concrete ways the value and utility of Douglas' categories in his own application of her group-grid model to different societies (1986:28-61). Cf.3.2.2.1.

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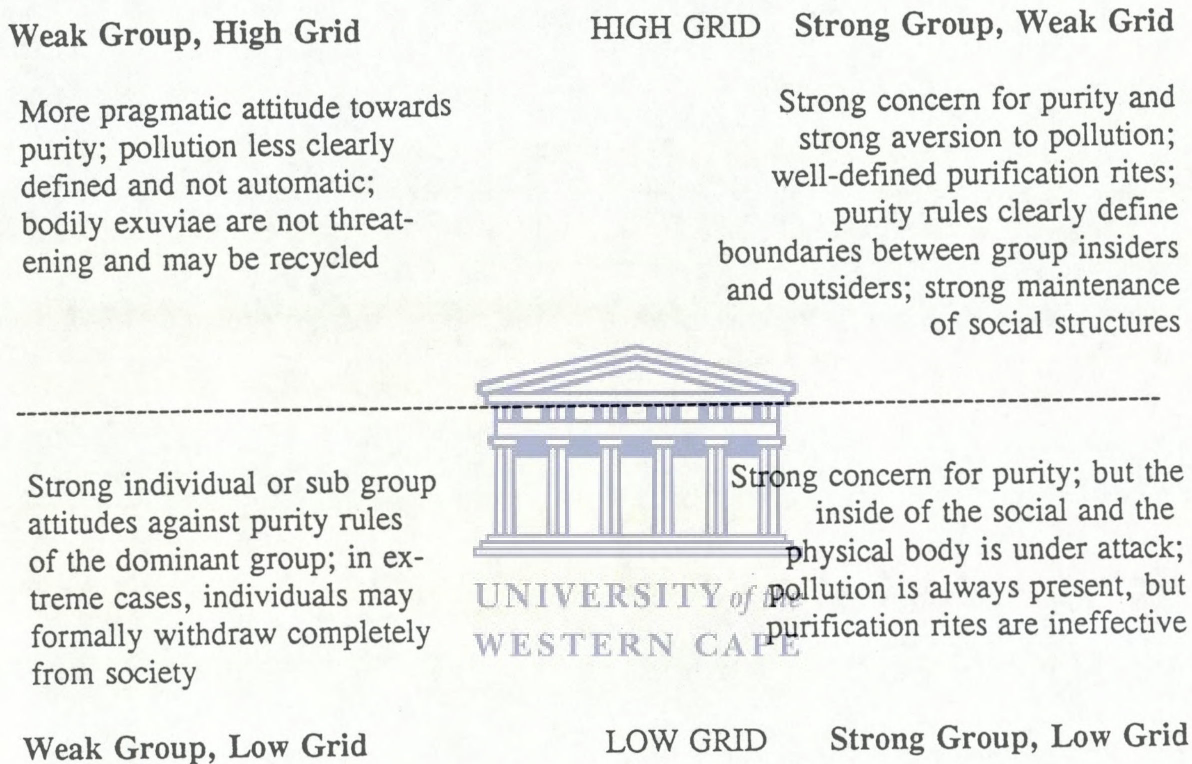
In the *first* diagram (Fig.5) we define only Douglas' studies of purity and pollution systems within the framework of the group-grid scheme. In so doing, we assume much of our earlier discussion of Douglas' work in this area.

Figure 5. *Group-Grid matrix:-purity and pollution*
(Adapted from Mary Douglas 1973 and Bruce Malina 1986:14-15)



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Isenberg and Owen are helpful in describing the categorical scheme of group and grid in relation to the specific system of *purity and pollution* discussed earlier:

> Where the sense of both group and grid are high, there we find strong concerns for piety, appropriate roles, controlled bodily behavior, and concern for pollution of the individual and the social bodies. In such a society, a group that works for or desires change, for whatever reasons, will reject the formalism, the ritual, the purity rules, or, comprehensively, the whole system of social controls that enforce the classification system that is being rejected" (1977:3).

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We are to understand that the reverse would be true where a sense of group and grid are low.

The *second* diagram (Fig.6) broadens our description of particular "script features" to include those of ritual, magic, personal identity, body, trance, sin, cosmology, and suffering /misfortune.

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Figure 6. *Group-Grid matrix of Douglas, reflecting 'cultural scripts'* (Adapted from Mary Douglas 1973 and from Isenberg and Owen 1977: 7-8 and Malina 1986: 14-15)

HIGH GRID

Weak Group, High Grid

Purity: pragmatic attitude toward purity; pollution is not automatic; bodily exuviae are not threatening and may be recycled
Rite: used for private as well as as public ends when present; the individual remains superior to the rite process; condensed symbols do not delimit reality

Magic: private; may be a strategy for success
Personal Identity: individualism; pragmatic and adaptable

Body: viewed instrumentally, as means to some end; self-controlled; treated pragmatically
Trance: not dangerous

Sin: basically caused by ignorance or failure; hence viewed as stupidity or embarrassment with loss of face; the individual is responsible

Cosmology: the universe is geared to individual success and initiative; the cosmos is benignly amoral; God is a junior partner; adequate causality
Suffering and Misfortune: an intelligent person ought to be able to avoid them; totally eradicable

Strong Group, High Grid

Purity: strong concern for purity; well-defined purification rites; purity rules define and maintain social structures
Rite: a society of fixed rites; rites express the internal classification system of the group; rite symbols perdure in all contexts of life; permanent sacred places
Magic: belief in the efficacy of symbolic behavior
Personal Identity: a matter of internalizing clearly articulated social roles; individual is subservient to, but not in conflict with, society; dyadic personality
Body: tightly controlled but a symbol of life

Trance: dangerous; either not allowed or tightly controlled and limited to a group of experts
Sin: the violation of formal rules; focus is upon behavior rather than on internal states of being; rites are efficacious in counteracting sin; individual is responsible for deviance
Cosmology: anthropomorphic; non-dualistic; the universe is just and reasonable; personal causality; limited good

Suffering and Misfortune: the result of automatic punishment for the violation of formal rules; part of a "divine" economy; can be alleviated but not eliminated

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(see next page)

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LOW GRID

Weak Group, Low Grid

Purity: anti the purity postures of the quadrant from which it emerged

Rite: anti the rites of the quadrant from which it emerged; effervescent; spontaneity valued

Magic: none; magic rejected

Personal Identity: no antagonism between society and the self; but the old society of the quadrant from which it derived is seen as oppressive; roles of previous quadrant are rejected; self-control and/or social control are low; highly individualistic

Body: irrelevant; life is spiritual; purity concerns are absent, but they may be rejected; body may be used freely or renunciation may prevail

Trance: approved, even welcomed; no fear of loss of self-control

Sin: a matter of personal ethics and interiority

Cosmology: the cosmos is likely be impersonal; there is individual and direct access to the divinity, usually without mediation; cosmos is benign

Suffering and Misfortune: love conquers all; love can eliminate

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Strong Group, Low Grid

Purity: strong concern for purity but the inside of the social and and physical body is under attack; pollution present but purification rites are ineffective

Rite: a society of fixed rites; rite is focused upon group boundaries, with great concern to expel pollutants (deviants) from the social body; fluid sacred places

Magic: ineffective in protecting individual and social bodies; a source of danger and pollution

Personal Identity: located in group membership, not in the internalization of roles, which are confused; distinction between appearance and internal states; dyadic personality

Body: social and physical bodies are tightly controlled but under attack; invaders break through bodily boundaries; not a symbol of life

Trance: dangerous; a matter of demonic possession; evil

Sin: a matter of pollution; evil is lodged within the individual and society; sin is much like a disease deriving from social structure; internal states of being are more important than adherence to formal rules; but latter are still valued

Cosmology: anthropomorphic; dualistic; warring forces of good and evil; the universe is not just and may be whimsical; personal causality; limited good

Suffering and Misfortune: unjust; not automatic punishment; attributed to malevolent forces; may be alleviated but not eliminated

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While the summary of 'script features' in Fig.6 is quite technical, it provides a useful description of how the group-grid categorical scheme might function as a model for cross-cultural analysis.[32]

2.4.4. Concluding summary

Our descriptive analysis of Douglas' group-grid categorical scheme suggests that she has provided us with a useful model for cross-cultural studies. Of special interest to us is the explanatory value and utility of her scheme for the study of the NT writings and their social world.

Firstly, Douglas' group-grid categorical scheme may help us to understand and explain in a general sense the type of society in which Jesus lived and in which Christianity was born. It also makes possible a comparative study between the 1st century Mediterranean world of Jesus and the early Christians on the one hand, and the 20th century world of readers of the NT writings on the other.

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Secondly, Douglas' group-grid model may enable us to understand the impact of such specific actions as Jesus' violation of Jewish purity rules in 1st century Palestine and the significance of these kinds of actions for the formation of early Christianity and NT theology.

Thirdly, Douglas' group-grid scheme appears to have great value for understanding the dynamics of social change in relation to different groups/movements and/or individuals in society (Isenberg and Owen 1977:3). In particular, we wish to

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[32]Malina provides a helpful description of most of the various 'script features' identified in Fig.6 (cf.1986:20-27).

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know how significant socio-cultural changes might have been for such visionaries as John the Baptist, Jesus and Paul. Also, Douglas' scheme suggests a means for explaining *how* and *why* Jesus and the early Christians (e.g.Pauline tradition) transformed the meaning and use of some dominant symbols and rituals in 1st century Judaism (e.g.fasting).[33]

Before we proceed, it would be helpful to summarize what we have attempted to do in the first two parts of our thesis. In *Part 1* our primary aim was to locate in broader historical context those social science methods which have gained importance and influence in recent decades of NT scholarship. In order to do this, we provided the backdrop of two major critical methods of biblical interpretation, viz., those of historical criticism and neo-orthodoxy. We mentioned that practitioners of the social science approaches to the NT believe that they provide a way beyond the limitations of the earlier methods. They affirm that their approaches significantly develop and deepen the questions of concern which generally occupy other NT scholars who utilize the earlier historical and theological methods.

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These practitioners of the social science methods are especially interested to address *how?* and *why?* questions in terms of such concerns as *social* structures, norms, values, processes and forces, and the dynamics of culture. All of these concerns have generally been neglected or ignored by other approaches to the NT up to now. As a way of addressing the crucial *how?* and *why?* questions, practitioners of the social science

[33]In Part 3, we explore, among other things, Malina's studies of the NT writings in relation to each of the three above mentioned qualities which appear to be implicit in Douglas' group-grid model. Beside these positive qualities, there are other valuable aspects of her entire methodology which Isenberg and Owen identify (cf.1977:2).

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methods have developed a variety of models of interpretation. They argue that these models help to explain particular aspects of NT writings and their social world. While these practitioners look essentially to sociology and anthropology for useful models for the study of the NT, our concern in this thesis is with some significant models provided by *cultural anthropology*.

In *Part 2* we undertook a descriptive analysis of the cultural anthropology of Mary Douglas. Her studies of a variety of socio-cultural systems and their symbolic worlds have proven very helpful for a number of NT scholars who desire to explain the origins of early Christianity and the meaning of NT texts. Our preliminary assessment of Douglas' cultural analyses is that they appear to provide theoretical constructs and models which are useful for understanding and explaining particular aspects of the NT writings and their social world.

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In *Part 3* we pursue further our study of cultural anthropology as one important dimension of the social science method of NT interpretation. In particular, we explore how one NT scholar, Bruce Malina has utilized the suggestive analyses of Mary Douglas in order to understand the NT writings and their social world.

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PART THREE

BRUCE MALINA AND NEW TESTAMENT INTERPRETATION: AN EXPLORATION OF A SOCIAL SCIENCE METHOD

3.1. Introductory

Because he is primarily addressing the contemporary, mainstream North American readers of the NT texts, Bruce Malina is acutely aware of a problem of *continuity and distance* which exists between the ancient NT texts and their world on the one hand, and the modern readers of these texts and their world on the other. In other words, he takes seriously the fact that the NT texts are first and foremost the language of persons who lived in the 1st century Mediterranean world, a cultural world very different from that of present day North American readers. Yet Malina is also convinced from his position within the Christian tradition that the language of the NT writings is capable of communicating with the contemporary readers (1986:1). How then are such readers of the NT texts to understand them "on their own terms" given the fact, for Malina, that the meaning of these texts must be understood essentially from within the socio-cultural milieu in which they were originally conceived and proclaimed (Malina 1981:v, 1)? In terms of Malina's overall hermeneutical concern, the issue of the socio-cultural context of the NT writings is absolutely critical for understanding these writings themselves (cf.Malina 1986:1).

In this part of our thesis we assess in which way Malina's cultural anthropological method may be *suggestive* of a more critically useful and creative hermeneutic for

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understanding the meaning of the NT texts. We want to know whether his cultural hermeneutic succeeds in advancing NT interpretation beyond the limitations of both the historical or theological methods surveyed earlier. Does his methodology which is rooted in cultural anthropology provide us deeper insight into the social world of the NT writings? Does he demonstrate the importance of socio-cultural factors for an understanding of the NT texts? In order to answer these and other questions, we give attention to three important and related aspects of Malina's hermeneutic.

Firstly, we seek to understand the basic presuppositions which underlie Malina's cultural hermeneutic. When Malina undertakes the task of NT interpretation and speaks of the meaning of NT language as derived from its own social system, what does he mean? In what way may Malina be focussing our attention on a neglected area of hermeneutics and providing us with the tools to deal with some basic hermeneutical problems? But also, how is Malina's methodology perhaps limited and in need of some redress?

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Secondly, we explore definite aspects of Malina's cultural hermeneutic. How does he demonstrate the value of cultural anthropological models as heuristic devices for understanding the NT writings? It appears that Malina has appropriated one significant aspect of cultural anthropological models, viz., their ability to correlate and compare different cultures, especially in terms of their symbolic worlds. But he has sought to exploit this virtue of cultural anthropology by using it to address a central hermeneutical question. This question has already been expressed in terms of the *continuity* and *distance* which exists between the NT texts and their world on the one hand and the modern

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readers and their world on the other. A major thrust of this part of our thesis is to understand and evaluate how Malina in fact addresses this hermeneutical question by using the models and insights which cultural anthropology provide.

Thirdly, we wish to demonstrate more precisely how Malina uses and/or adapts Douglas' models, particularly her insights about purity and pollution systems and their significance for understanding Christian origins and NT theology. We also explore Malina's use of Douglas' group-grid matrix for describing and understanding the 1st century socio-cultural world of the Mediterranean, the primary context of the NT writings. In what way does Malina really get us "to hear the meaning of the [NT] texts in terms of the cultural contexts in which they were originally proclaimed" (Malina 1981:v)?

3.1.1. Some basic presuppositions

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Malina believes that if the central task of biblical study is to help with the understanding of the NT writings, then such a task must begin by acknowledging that "the books of the Bible are meaningful configurations of language intended to communicate" (1986:1). But he insists that if we are to accomplish the task of understanding the meanings encoded in the biblical writings themselves, then we must know how the language of the biblical writings ultimately derives its meaning in the first place.[1]

[1]In 1.3. above, we made some preliminary remarks about Malina's understanding of the meaning of language. We develop these remarks here.

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Malina is conversant with sociolinguistic analysis which utilizes the sociosemiotic theory of language with its focus on such concepts as text, situation, register, code, linguistic system and social structure (Halliday 1978; cf.Bernstein 1973). To speak of *text* as a sociosemiotic process is to understand it as "a sociological event, a semiotic encounter through which the meanings that constitute the social system are *exchanged*" (Halliday 1978:139). But the text is also embedded in a particular *situation*, that is, "the environment in which the text comes to life" and in which the meaning of the text is created and exchanged by the members of that environment (Halliday 1978:109,141). This situation or environment constitutes the *social system*. In short, the text is "the linguistic form of social interaction", expressing the range of meanings exchanged and understood by members in a particular situation or social system (Halliday 1978:122).

In the context of NT textual interpretation, then, the all important question for Malina is "where do the meanings expressed in wordings expressed in soundings/spellings come from?" He replies, "the answer is the social system" (1986:1). What Malina suggests here as a primary thesis of his whole hermeneutic is certainly a controversial one.[2]

But as he elaborates:

> Language is but one form of communication, even if the most significant, and common speech forms communicate much more than simply wordings and their encoded meanings. Rather they transmit a hidden load of shared assumptions, a collective and shared set of interpretations of reality that

[2]We are critically aware of how new literary critics of the Bible would differ sharply from Malina's presupposition that social systems give meaning to language in the sense that he seems to suggest. For one thing, they would argue that Malina is too reductionistic. We take up this important issue in Part 4 of our thesis.

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> make up the culture of a particular group. To interpret any piece of language adequately is to interpret the social system that it expresses. If these observations are accurate, then the attentive Bible reader would have to find a way to proceed from the text to the social system that imparts meaning. The [unsatisfactory] alternative is for the reader to supply his or her own meaning to the text (1986:2).

Already, the perspective of Malina finds a note of resonance with Mary Douglas who also stresses how all human communication (including language) mediates information from a particular social system (Douglas 1975:87). And as we noted earlier, Malina's thesis has direct implications for the task of a critical biblical hermeneutics itself. For he desires to move beyond either the historical or theological interpretations of the NT texts to an understanding of how their socio-cultural world provides an indispensable context for interpreting their meaning (Malina 1986:4).[3]

Yet, in terms of what we have said above, Malina does seem to occupy the broad tradition of the critical study of the Bible, especially that of historical criticism. In Part 1 of our thesis, we observed that the historical method accepts not only the importance of *distance* between the biblical texts and the contemporary readers of these texts, but it also recognizes that any method for understanding the texts must take them seriously within their own (foreign) contexts rather than imposing meanings on the texts from the 'outside'. Malina himself is appreciative of how the historical and literary analyses of NT texts provide us with information of "great value for making the Word of God

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[3]Again, we must ask whether or not Malina demonstrates a reductionist tendency in his methodology, by seeing the meaning of texts too sharply in terms of their social context? Cf. Part 4.

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intelligible" (1981:v). But he fears that even such information often leads to a kind of 'false consciousness' among contemporary readers of the Bible. As he explains:

> [M]ost of the time Bible students take all such information and conceive it as operating in much the same way as it would operate in our own [North American] society. Such unconscious shuffling of cultural contexts might make the Bible immediately relevant to the student, but at what cost to the meaning intended by the sacred author, the meaning most Christians would hold to be intended by God (1981:v).

Therefore, despite the value of the earlier historical method which he acknowledges and shares, Malina believes that something "new in biblical studies" is required. There is the need of a different hermeneutical method that overcomes the limitations, not only of the historical method, but also the theological and literary interpretations of biblical texts. By "new" Malina means that we are to extend and deepen the concerns of historical and theological criticism, especially in relation to NT interpretation. We must seek answers to "[q]uestions about the social norms and values that made up the world of first-century Palestine, as well as the methods for answering such questions" (Malina 1981:3). Foremost among such questions of this "new" approach in NT interpretation is *how* the NT texts have been endowed with meaning by their socio-cultural context, and especially, *why* such meanings are given? (cf.Malina 1981:2-6).

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From the standpoint of his interpretative framework, Malina sums up what he perceives as the main project of all biblical scholarship today:

> Without some attempt to reconstruct and enter the social world of the biblical authors, it would seem that one can only be an inconsiderate reader, ethnocentrically anachronistic in highly sophisticated ways. The best a contemporary biblical scholar might offer Bible readers is a way to get back to the domains of reference which derive from and are appropriate

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to the social world from which the biblical texts derive. All interpretation, it would seem, requires and ultimately rests on such models (Malina 1986:4-5; cf.1982).

Up to this point, we have outlined the first basic presupposition of Malina's hermeneutical method, viz., that meanings encoded in the NT writings are to be understood essentially from within the context of their own social system. We now describe Malina's second major presupposition which he articulates as follows:

> *All human beings are entirely the same, entirely different, and somewhat the same and somewhat different at the same time* (Malina 1981:7).

This presupposition becomes clearer when expressed diagrammatically (cf.Fig.7).

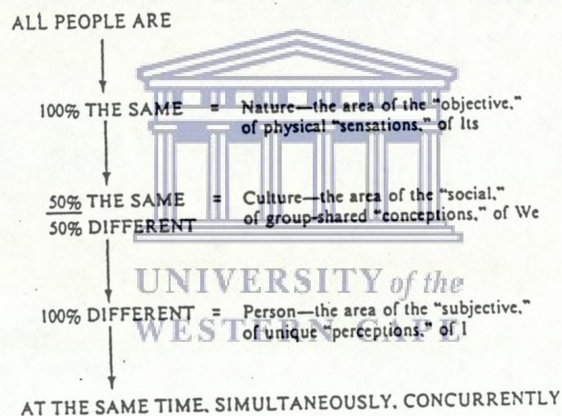

Fig.7. *The Basic Presupposition-Nature, Culture, Person* (Adapted from Malina 1981:8)

It is necessary to understand each part of the presupposition (Malina 1981:8-9; cf.1986:5-8).

The first part, *all human beings are entirely the same*, focusses attention on the similarities in all human societies. It relates to the commonly defined sphere of "nature", that is, "all that exists apart from purposeful, willful human influence". Other ways of

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defining this sphere involve speaking of the "objective" and the "scientific". Moreover, we are dealing here with physical concerns, identified with "sensations", the "it".

The second part, *all human beings are entirely different*, directs attention to the unique qualities and features of individual human beings. It relates to the sphere of "personhood", that is, "the area of personal story, of incommunicable biography". We can identify this sphere with what we mean by the "subjective" and "perceptions". And we speak of it in terms of the "I".

The third part, *all human beings are somewhat the same and somewhat different*, lays stress on "the interplay of similarities and differences within human communities". It relates to what we understand by the term "culture", the arena of the "social" and that which describes "conceptions" which bond a particular group of individuals together. We speak here in terms of the "we".

The phrase, *at the same time*, is a vital part of the presupposition. It emphasizes that all:

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> human knowing is, in fact, simultaneously objective, subjective, and social. Nature, culture, and person tend to kaleidoscope, with all simultaneously present, yet with the emphasis on the one or the other, depending on various factors (Malina 1981:9).

All that we have stated up to now regarding Malina's basic presuppositions are significant, not least because he himself understands them to undergird a proper understanding and explanation the NT writings and their social world. At the center of his concern is the *social* and *cultural system* which creates and embodies the meaning of language in the NT writings themselves. As Malina describes it:

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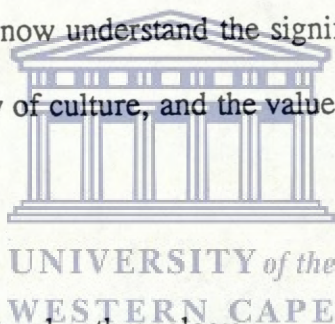
> In terms of nature, the persons described in the New Testament would be just like us and everyone else in the world. In terms of personhood and uniqueness, they would be as unfathomable as we are to each other. On the other hand, in terms of cultural story, cultural cues, cultural script, they would be somewhat like us, yet somewhat unlike us: like us in terms of human nature; unlike us in terms of the cultural interpretation of human nature (1981:9; cf.1986:8).

Malina's method appears to be suggestive of a more manageable, clear, and comparative model for engaging in a sensitive, yet critical cross-cultural study of the NT writings. One danger might be that his method may be too general so as to impair its particular validity and utility for explaining the meaning of NT texts, especially the theology it expresses.[4]

It is important that we now understand the significance of cultural anthropology for Malina, especially his view of culture, and the value of Douglas' cultural models for the task of NT interpretation.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3.1.2. The significance of cultural anthropology

Malina is clearly indebted to the cultural anthropology of Mary Douglas. Yet our primary concern is not to duplicate Malina's description of Douglas' work, since we have attempted to provide just such a descriptive analysis in the previous part of our thesis. Instead, we are more keen to demonstrate how, in a *methodological* sense, Malina uses Douglas' models to explain particular aspects of Christian origins and NT theology in light of the NT writings themselves.

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[4] We address this issue in our discussion of whether or not Malina's hermeneutic is reductionistic. Cf. 4.2.1.

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For Malina it follows logically, that if the 'foreign' language of the NT writings is to be understood according to its own encoded meaning, rather than our imposed codes of meaning, then the *social* or *cultural* system "that endows the text with meaning" must assume indispensable importance (1986:5). We must now ask what Malina understands by culture. He defines *culture* as:

> a system of symbols relating to and embracing people, things and events that are socially symboled. Symboling means filling people, things, and events with meaning and value (feeling), making them meaningful in such a way that all the members of a given group mutually share, appreciate, and live out of that meaning and value in some way (1981:11; cf.1988:11; Kluckhohn 1962:73).

In terms of Malina's perspective, culture functions essentially to give meaning and feeling to everything that surrounds (mainly groups of) persons within the physical and human environment of space and time. Culture represents the implicit and explicit patterns, boundaries or lines of or for human behavior, allowing for the meaningful interaction of human groups in the world.

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Given the above scenario, we may now understand why *cultural anthropology* takes a kind of center-stage in Malina's study of the Bible. For it is this discipline of study that is particularly interested in the socially and symbolically contrived lines which groups of human beings mark off for themselves and which give everyone and everything its proper place and meaning in the world (cf.Malina 1986:10-11). Cultural anthropology, as we saw in our discussion of Douglas, defines these 'lines' or 'boundaries' in terms of *purity rules*. How we understand these purity rules is of critical importance in understanding human groups, their particular worlds of perceiving, feeling, acting, believing, admiring, and striving (cf.Malina 1981: 14-16).

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Malina believes that the cultural anthropology of Mary Douglas is especially useful in making such understanding possible. Three reasons may be offered for why Douglas is so important for Malina. *Firstly,* Douglas, like Malina, places socio-cultural systems and their symbolic worlds at the center of any understanding of human groups in terms of their total conceptions, perceptions and experiences. *Secondly,* Douglas' extensive anthropological studies over a number of years have focussed directly on a variety of cultures. Malina accepts the anthropological insights derived from such studies as particularly significant for properly understanding the social world of 1st century Mediterranean societies.

Thirdly, and certainly most vital from Malina's perspective as a modern day reader of the NT texts, Douglas' purity-pollution and group-grid models provide powerful heuristic tools for both the comparative cross-cultural analysis of the social world of these texts and a more accurate interpretation of their meaning. We state Malina's hypothesis regarding the group-grid model of Douglas to illustrate his view of its value for NT studies:

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> Douglas' grid and group model has only four quadrants; hence it should prove easy to work with...By applying Douglas' model to understand and interpret the New Testament writings, understanding and interpretation should be facilitated because of the access to comparative social systems the model provides (1988:16-17).

In short, Douglas' group-grid model provides a useful means for addressing the significant hermeneutical problem for Malina, viz., "how to move from a text to the social system that endows the text with meaning" (1986:5).

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Malina's hypothesis regarding the usefulness of Douglas' group-grid model takes us to the heart of his cultural hermeneutic which is the all-important place and value of cultural anthropological *models* for understanding the NT writings. Whether or not Malina is justified in his hypothesis regarding the explanatory value and utility of Douglas' purity-pollution and group-grid models for NT interpretation is among the vital concerns we explore in this part of the thesis and attempt to address more critically in the next.

3.2. Exploring Malina's Cultural Hermeneutic

We have already mentioned several times that Malina sees a distance (essentially of meaning) between the NT writings and its social world on the one hand, and the social world of the contemporary reader of these writings on the other. Although rooted firmly in the tradition of social science perspectives on the Bible, the methodology of Malina does not ignore, but rather presupposes the important contributions of historical and literary criticism (cf.1986:iv). Furthermore, he is vitally interested in the critical theological issues and problems which arise out of biblical studies (1981:153-154). We have also understood that when Malina speaks of the contemporary reader of the NT writings, he means *primarily* the reader in mainstream North American society.[5]

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[5]The importance of Malina's cultural hermeneutic for readers of the NT writings who live in other contexts, especially that of the Third World, will have to be assessed. However, while we acknowledge its importance,we do not undertake this task in our thesis.

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These preliminary observations form the basis for what we proceed to say about Malina's understanding of models as well as his own methodological approach to the NT writings. Earlier we mentioned a number of critical questions that we hope to bring in some form or another to our exploration of Malina's interpretative approach to the NT writings. It may be helpful at this stage to capture the essence of these questions in terms of two important criteria, viz. (i) whether or not Malina's cultural hermeneutic sheds a clear light of understanding on the NT texts themselves (cf.Harrington 1980:183), and (ii) whether or not Malina recovers for us (as he explicitly desires to do) "the sheer delight in reading and using the [NT] as it is" (1983:119).

We start by expressing the overall importance of models for Malina in his studies of the NT writings. Models are used

> to provide a [big] picture within which to situate the contemporary NT interpreter (student and scholar alike), the first-century A.D. Hellenistic authors and audiences of the various early Christian texts, and the personages peopling those texts (1986:iii).

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Methodologically, this 'big picture' or 'overview approach' is advantageous for Malina, in that "it is consistently comparative, heading off ethnocentrism from the outset" (Malina 1986:iv).

Furthermore, Malina outlines three main steps in his methodological use of models to act as a safeguard against what he terms "the twin pitfalls of human understanding: superficiality and inaccuracy" (1981:17).[6] These steps, which we already made mention

[6]Again, whether or not Malina fully escapes the accusations of 'superficiality', 'inaccuracy', and even 'ethnocentrism' will need to be assessed later. Cf.4.2.1. For now, we note only his own stated methodological concern.

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of in the first part of the thesis, are (i) to postulate a model, (ii) to test the model against the experiences of the real world it relates to, in this case, of 1st century Palestinian Judaism, and (iii) to modify the model depending on the results (1981:17).

3.2.1. Purity systems, Christian origins, and NT theology

In the final chapter of *The New Testament World* (1981), Malina analyzes the NT writings with a view to interpreting, explaining and understanding Christian purity arrangements within the context of 1st century Palestinian Judaism. He observes that purity concerns were "central" in this social world (1981:122). In this judgment he is not alone (cf.Neusner 1978:103-127; Neyrey 1986:93-124; Countryman 1988:45-65). Numerous NT passages themselves bear out the truth of Malina's judgment (e.g.Mk.1:40-45; 7:14-16; Acts 10:1-48; Gal.4:10; Col.2:16).

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In view of our earlier study of Douglas' analyses of purity systems among various cultures, it is not surprising that Malina finds her work extremely useful for his particular analysis of purity rules in 1st century Palestine. Here, we do not describe Douglas' own analyses in detail, nor do we describe Malina's summary of her important insights in terms of his own analyses of Jewish and early Christian attitudes and actions in relation to purity rules.[7]

Instead, in our exploration of Malina's cultural hermeneutic, we shall evaluate from time to time just how Malina utilizes Douglas' insights and models. We shall note

[7]For this, compare Malina's outline of the principal features of Douglas' work (1981: esp.125-137).

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where he departs from or goes beyond her particular understanding, in this case, of purity rules. In fact, when Malina reminds us that he is not concerned either to interpret or reproduce Douglas' ideas "properly and adequately", and that in some places, he even differs from her, he implicitly invites us to be critically sensitive to his use of her work (Malina 1986:iv).

Also, in his particular study of purity rules in 1st century Palestine in the final chapter of *The New Testament World* (as is the case for all other studies in this book), Malina does not include step three directly in his use of models (i.e. to modify the model depending on the results). Instead, he leaves his analysis more open-ended. Through the provision of some definite guidelines for "testing his hypotheses", Malina invites us to undertake this task the light of numerous OT and NT passages which he suggests as particularly relevant to the concern of purity in the NT writings (1981:151-152).[8] As part of our concluding assessment of Malina's methodology for understanding early Christianity and purity rules, we shall state whether or not the numerous texts on the subject indeed 'fit' his models. But we must first assess Malina's own study of purity rules.

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3.2.1.1. *Sacred and profane*

[8]In keeping with his practical approach to provide an *introduction* to the study of the NT world in *The New Testament World*, Malina is keen to get pastors, students, and teachers, actively engaged in the study itself. This itself is a rather useful approach to the study of the NT writings.

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Malina utilizes Mary Douglas' analysis of purity and pollution systems, in particular her studies in *Purity and Danger (1966)* and "Deciphering a Meal" (1972). But because he wishes to clarify the nature and function of purity rules for North American persons, Malina begins by drawing on examples from the mundane world experiences of such persons. Methodologically, he is in line with Douglas' own approach, for she too starts with people's everyday ideas of clean and uncleanness.

Malina's controlling presuppositions enable him to find a contact point between the culture of the 1st century Mediterranean world of the NT writings and that of the 20th century world of North American readers of these writings (cf.Fig.7). He finds it both legitimate and helpful, therefore, to proceed from the experiences of mainstream North Americans in order to describe both the significance of purity systems for *all* cultures (primitive and modern), and the usefulness of such systems for understanding the place and function of purity rules in the NT writings. But Malina is careful to identify not only the *commonality of experience* between the two very different social worlds (i.e. 1st century Mediterranean and 20th century North America), but also the very different or *foreign* world of early Christianity as compared with contemporary (Western) culture. The latter is a fact easily forgotten in the reading and interpretation of NT texts on any subject. In short, distinction (a mainly historical concern) and commonality (a mainly social science concern) are accepted as important for Malina. But he places himself, methodologically, more firmly in the social science tradition of interpretation when he states:

> I think it would be a fault in method to claim distinctiveness before commonalities have been

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discerned and accounted for (Malina 1983:20; cf.Gager 1982:265).[9]

Malina starts by placing his discussion of purity rules within the sphere of the *sacred and profane*, a notable concern of cultural anthropology. He utilizes numerous examples from mainstream North American society to demonstrate the relevance of such a concern, not only for biblical studies as a whole, but also for the everyday life of readers engaged in such studies. For example, he invites us to imagine ourselves in the situation of a person studying who suddenly hears someone in the area crying out for help. Malina proceeds:

> What is your reaction? You might get up, attempt to scare off an intruder, call a security guard or the police. But what if the person being assaulted and screaming for help is your mother, father, sister, or brother? What is your reaction then? How do you feel? The feeling you have for those persons somehow set apart and special to you, your parents, brothers, and sisters, for example, is *a feeling of the sacred*. Other human beings normally do not get you so emotionally involved when they are in dire straits. After all, you see them on the TV news every day; *those others are profane* as far as you are concerned (1981:123; italics mine).

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In this way, Malina redefines the purity and pollution categories of Douglas in terms of the sacred and profane.

> The sacred is that which is set apart to or for some person. It includes persons, places, things, and times that are symboled or filled with some sort of set-apartness which we and others recognize. The sacred is what is mine as opposed to what is yours or theirs, what is ours as opposed to what is yours or theirs...The opposite to the sacred is the profane, the unholy, the non-sacred. The profane is that which is not set apart to or for some person in any exclusive way, that which might be everybody's and nobody's in particular to varying degrees (1981:124).

[9]Cf. 1.4.1. for our early discussion of this matter, especially as it relates to Malina's own perspective.

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It is clear that Malina is close to Douglas in his ideas of the 'sacred' and the 'profane', and he appears justified in understanding her categories of 'purity' and 'pollution' in these terms.[10] For the moment, we accept Malina's approach, since our primary aim is to assess the overall explanatory value and utility of his hermeneutic.

Malina proceeds to define the meaning of 'purity' in the more familiar Douglas categories of 'dirt' as 'matter out of place', and in terms of the three cultural cues of the 'acceptable', the 'ambiguous' and the 'anomalous' or 'abominable'. With Douglas, Malina explains the reason why any culture cannot ignore, but must have an interpretative framework that deals with the anomalous or abominable (Malina 1981:125-131; cf.2.2.1 above).

We may summarize what we have observed about Malina's methodology up to this point. *Firstly*, Malina clearly demonstrates a departure from more traditional approaches to an understanding of purity rules in biblical texts. Rather than beginning with a 'spiritualizing' of purity rules, or providing us with a mere exposé of historical ideas of purity, or simply outlining a number of theological definitions of purity, he has provided some concrete examples of these purity in socio-cultural terms. Such an approach appears to be equally relevant for understanding purity rules in 20th century North American culture as it is for 1st century Palestinian Judaic culture.

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[10]However, we shall have to assess whether or not Malina (or Douglas) is able to capture the NT view of purity and pollution through an appeal to such present and mundane traditions. Again, this issue revolves around whether or not the methods of Douglas and Malina tend toward reductionism. Cf. 4.2.1.

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Secondly, Malina's methodology appears to be consistent with his (and Douglas') hypothesis that *meaning* (in this case, of purity rules) is supplied by socio-cultural systems as a *whole*. It follows that knowledge of such systems are essential for a better understanding of the purity rules themselves.

Thirdly, although Malina clearly shares the vital concern of historical-criticism for the historical reconstruction of the past in order to understand ideas of purity, he extends and deepens such a concern by emphasizing the importance and value of *socio-cultural* norms, values, structures, processes and forces for understanding and explaining particular human beliefs, practices and experiences in terms of these purity rules.

3.2.1.2. *Replication theory and purity rules*

Malina's cultural hermeneutic demonstrates his appreciation for Douglas' replication theory. He uses it to address the particular character and function of purity classification categories in Judaism, in relation to persons, animals, practices, places and times (1981:131-143). We seek to understand how Malina appropriates Douglas' replication theory and what results he achieves in terms of understanding the NT writings themselves.[11]

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In his particular concern to interpret and explain the meaning of Christian purity arrangements, Malina establishes two models, one of space, and another of time. In this

[11]Apart from his extensive use of Douglas' theoretical constructs (already described in Part 2), Malina also uses particular parts of Jeremias's *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (1969) which he then restructures within the framework of his analysis adapted from Douglas.

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way, he seeks to understand human interaction in 1st century Jewish society on a number of levels, viz. (i) between human beings (esp.Jews) and other human beings, (ii) between humans and animals, (iii) between human beings and things, (iv) between human beings and places, (v) between human beings and events, and importantly, (vi) between human beings and God. In the process, Malina identifies the critical place and function of important social and cultural symbols within 1st century Judaism, viz. the Temple, Jerusalem, the holy land of Palestine, and the world at large (1981:139). He allows us to see that 1st century Palestinian Jewish rules of purity which were applied in any one set of interactions in which Jews were involved were also replicated in every other area of life. For example, the Temple replicates the holy land of Palestine and demarcates the place and function of boundary lines in relation to God's people, God's space, and the world at large (cf.Fig.8).

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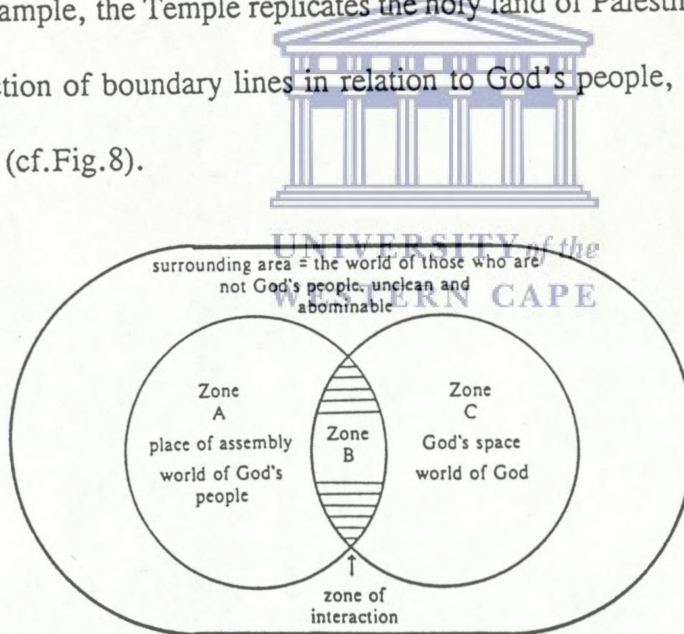

Fig.8. *Purity rules in 1st century Judaism, expressing the relationship between God's people, God's space, and the world.* (Adapted from Malina 1981:145)

Malina also highlights the fact that "Israel believed that its margins, its purity lines, were God-given and God-willed" (1981:141). This fact is crucial for understanding

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NT writings on the subject of purity, not because we may not otherwise have inferred what Malina says about this important Jewish belief from either a historical or a theological perspective, but because he has incorporated the proper understanding and explanation of such a belief within the broad framework of Jewish socio-cultural and symbolic systems.

We may further summarize Malina's own view of Temple spatial categories within the vertical grid that he provides (Fig.9). In this way we readily discern the relationship of symbolic spatial categories to those categories presented in the social worlds of the OT (the Solomonic Temple) and the 1st century NT period (Herod's Temple).[12]

Symbolic space category	*O.T. category*	*1st century*
mixed nature: clean, unclean, and abominations	outside the camp	outside the holy land
mixed culture: clean or unclean, but no abominations	inside the camp	in the holy land replicated by Jerusalem, the holy city
zone A: space of God's people: assembly space	court of tent	Temple mount and courts of a. Gentiles (strangers and sojourners in the land) b. (Israelite) women c. Israelites
threshold of God's space zone B: space of interaction final limits of man's space	altar and laver table and seven-branched candlestick curtain before the sanctuary	
zone C: God's space	tent with ark holy of holies	porch holy place holy of holies

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Fig.9. *Jewish purity rules in terms of Temple symbolic space categories in OT and NT periods* (Adapted from Malina 1981:141)

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[12]Malina observes that there are two main texts describing Solomon's Temple (i) Ex.25-27, even though the Temple is presented in and spatially set up in the wilderness and (ii) Ezek.40-43, the future Temple which is based on recollections of Solomon's temple. Then we have Herod's Temple in the 1st century, the so-called "Second Temple" which is based on biblical regulations and later practices (cf.Jeremias 1969:79-82).

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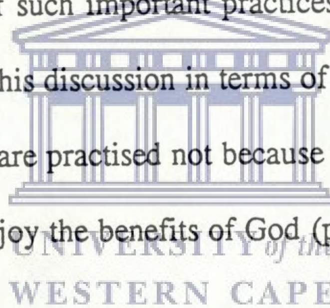
In the foregoing diagrams (Figs. 7 & 8), we have in the form of spatial models, a description of purity patterns in Jewish society right up to and including 1st century Palestine.[13] As Malina succinctly sums up this pattern:

> the holy of holies marks the center of the Temple mount, which marks the center of Jerusalem, which marks the center of the holy land, which marks the center of the world. At the center of centers, God's people have the opportunity to interact with him under the ceremonial direction of God's priests aided by their Levites (1981:142).

Given the above discussion by Malina of the important function of replication within the social and symbolic system of 1st century Jewish Palestine, Malina proceeds to explain the meaning (why?) of such important practices as Jewish Temple sacrifices and Temple meals. He develops his discussion in terms of *patron and client relations* in that society.[14] Temple sacrifices are practised not because God needs them, but because God's people (clients) need to enjoy the benefits of God (patron). In a similar way, the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[13]Although we should note that spatial arrangements were redefined, for example, at Qumran. Here, the community of faith, rather than the Jerusalem Temple defined purity lines for the members. This observation is crucial for our later understanding of Jesus' and Paul's own redefinition of purity rules in Christian terms. In light of Qumran, the purity reforms of Jesus and Paul do not appear so radical or without some precedent (cf.Segal 1986:49,130; Isenberg and Owen 1977:11).

[14]We do not develop Malina's discussion on *patron and client relations* in this thesis. We mention the importance of these relations here, only because of its importance for what he has to say about purity rules (cf.1981:71-93). Malina is not alone in his views on the importance of patron-client relations in 1st century Palestine (e.g. cf.Oakman 1986:95-22). We have to ask, though, whether patron-client relations are as relevant for Palestinian Judaism during the time of Jesus as it was for Hellenistic Judaism, especially during the period of Pauline mission in Asia Minor? Malina offers a strong argument for the relevance of such relations, even during the time of Jesus.

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Temple meal symbolizes "the fellowship of a benign patron with his clients" (Malina 1981:142).

We may summarize the importance of Malina's understanding of replication theory in terms of the purity rules of 1st century Judaism. *Firstly*, this theory reveals how purity rules applied in one set of human interactions in the Jewish world had significance of all other human interactions within that society.

Secondly, replication theory helps to explain the central importance and powerful place of the Jewish Temple in defining the boundaries of space (and time) for most Jews in their relation to God and all human beings in their society (cf.n.13).

3.2.1.3. *Jesus, Paul and purity rules*

We must now assess the specific meaning of *Christian* responses to the 1st century Jewish purity system in light of Malina's framework of analysis (1981:143-152). In particular we are interested in *how* Malina's interpretative method helps us understand the NT writings in their descriptions of the actions and beliefs of Jesus and the early Christians (especially Paul) in relation to Jewish purity rules. Again, much of what Malina says may be validated by a historical or a theological method of interpretation. But whereas the former methods generally stress the (narrower) *religious* nature of NT beliefs in this area, Malina is more concerned with the *social formation* and *social function* of these beliefs within the broader purity system of the time. For him, the social system gives meaning to the various symbols of purity. And *this* meaning has implications which may be interpreted in historical or theological terms.

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We use Malina's illustration of Jesus' healings on the Sabbath to explain the significance of socio-cultural factors for understanding the meaning of Sabbath laws (e.g.Mk.1:21-27; 3:1-6; Matt.12;1-14). As he writes:

> By healing on the sabbath, Jesus provokes debate about the meaning of the sabbath- hence about the meaning of purity rules applied to his time. This, of course, would imply questions of the meaning of purity rules applied to space and persons as well, since such rules replicate each other, and an alteration in one set requires alteration in the others (Malina 1981:143).

From Malina's perspective, Jesus accepts the purity system of 1st century Judaism, especially as these are expounded in the rules of the OT.[15] What Jesus questions, however, is

> the general *social purpose of these rules* and the way they were interpreted in line with this purpose. Their purpose is not to lop off ever greater portions of God's people from access to God, symboled by the clean and the sacred of the purity rules (thus constricting or diminishing zone A [cf.Figs.8 & 9]. Rather, *they are to facilitate access to God*. The purity rules are to make this access easier, not close it off (Malina 1981:143, italics mine).

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Consequently, the *social purpose* and *meaning* of Jewish purity rules become the context for Jesus' own theological interpretation of their meaning, viz. "the sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath" (Mk.2:27; see Malina 1981:143).

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[15]Malina does not explain in what sense Jesus accepted the Jewish purity system. Like Neyrey (1986:108-109,115), he suggests more strongly how Jesus disregards rather than complies with "the maps" (people, body, times, places, etc,) of Jewish purity. Yet, Malina is right in assuming that in his debates with the Jewish leaders, Jesus reflects an implicit acceptance of the Jewish purity system. This is evident, for example, in his use of the synagogue for much of his teaching, his appropriation of Israel's faith and tradition when he makes his response to the controversial questions of the Jewish leaders, and his occasional instruction to those he heals that they comply with the purity rituals of Judaism (e.g.Mk.1:40-45).

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Several other implications of Jesus' interpretation of the Sabbath within the context of its broader social purpose are suggested by Malina's analysis. (i) God does not need the purity rules (e.g. Sabbath and sacrifices) for God is perfect and open to all Israelites both good and bad (Mt.5:45). (ii) Since God is open to all, obedience to God's will requires all Israelites to be open to fellow Israelites, good or bad. (iii) The purity rules are not for the mechanical and external maintenance of social-cultural systems, but rather for the welfare of people. (iv) These actions of welfare are to be expressive of the *heart*, a symbol of the *whole* person and a discerner of *proper* rather than *lopsided* priorities (cf.Mk.7:10-12; Mt.15:4-6; cf.Mt.5:23-24), and of *righteous* rather than *unrighteous* actions (Mk.7:14-23).[16]

In light of all this, Jesus' actions and teaching signify, for Malina, "a new vision of priorities based upon Jesus' own perception of God and God's will" (1981:144). In this context, the purity rules assume important symbolic value for Jesus, but nevertheless they are subordinate to the central concerns of God and God's will. Moreover, "the emphasis ought not to be on how Israel should approach God, but on how God in fact approaches Israel" (Malina 1981:144).

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Malina's hermeneutic appears to be highly suggestive up to this point. It has provided us with both a socio-cultural and a theological context within which to better

[16]Cf. 3.2.2.1. Here we mention the three zone "non- introspective model" which was implicit (and often explicit) for understanding human and divine reactions and behavior in the social world of the NT writings. In this context, the *heart* (as was true of other physical parts of a person) signified (symbolically) an important interrelationship between the inward self and the outward action of the person. A number of biblical texts support this view (cf.Malina 1979:131-137).

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understand Jesus' own reform of the symbolic system of purity rules in 1st century Palestinian Judaism. We express two further aspects of Malina's analysis which are also significant for understanding the attitudes and actions of Jesus and Paul with respect to 1st century purity rules.

Firstly, we are able to understand why Jesus directed so much of his actions (e.g.healing) to those on the periphery or even outside the boundary lines of formal Judaism, and in this way both redrew the spatial map of the purity system itself and defined the meaning of symbols such as Torah and Temple sacrifices (cf.Fig.10).

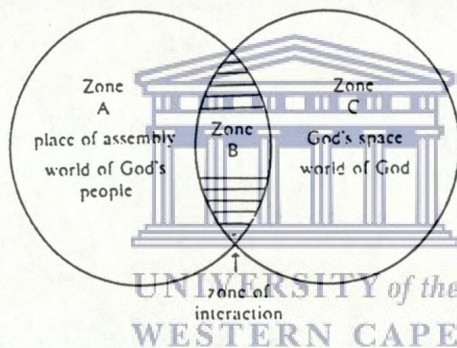

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Fig.10. *Redefinition of 1st century Jewish purity rules by Jesus in terms of his new vision of God and God's will.* (Adapted from Malina 1981:145)

We may observe that Zone B reflecting the zone of interaction with God "is to replicate and reveal how God acts toward his people (openness to all, openhanded and openhearted), not to replicate and support how Israel has acted toward God in the past (selective defensiveness developed in traditioning past)" (Malina 1981:144-145). Zone A, the place of God's people according to formal Judaism, is now opened up, as is Zone C, the sphere of God's world. It follows, then, that

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> God's place is wherever God chooses to reveal himself, wherever people strive to obey and honor God in line with his Torah. The place of assembly is wherever God's people gather to obey and honor him (1981:145).

Secondly, Malina helps us to understand why, in light of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, the early Christians such as Paul came increasingly to affirm "a Christocentric being 'in Christ' (Christ occupying zone B)" in place of "a Torah-centric being in Israel" (1981:146). Yet this alternative vision of the early Christians posed its own problems. For exactly *how* did a person, especially Gentile believers, get 'in Christ'? The solution to this problem is itself linked to the understanding of the purity system of Judaism, but now in the context of early Christianity.

The Jerusalem Council, consisting of the apostolic administration (in contrast to the Jewish elites of Israel), reinterpret the Torah and propose one solution by defining a minimum set of purity rules for Gentile Christians (Acts 15:28-29; cf.Lev.17:8-16; 18:1-23). Paul proposes a different solution. He rejects "the purity rules of Israel-raised to the rank of *law* and sanctioned by administrative authority" and instead returns to Jewish *custom* to understand the 'new' function of purity rules for Christians 'in Christ'.

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The distinction between 'law' and 'custom' in the context of the broader social 'norms' of 1st century Judaeo-Christian society receives more detailed attention elsewhere in Malina's work (cf.1986:112-138). We note, briefly, what he means by this distinction by reference to his discussion on "Kinship and Marriage" in 1st century Palestine:

> Now when I say that Paul rejects the law and reverts to custom, what I mean is that he no longer recognizes the political institution of Judaism consisting of the priestly elite of Jerusalem, the Sanhedrin, and their formalized norms, the Torah. He thus rejects the Jewish priestly system and its sanctions in favor of norms and sanctions deriving from the

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> interacting partners within the group-in this case, the dyadic persons interacting within the community called the church. The customs Paul envisions as binding Christians in their reciprocal interactions derive from the activity of God's power, the Spirit, within those communities (1981:115).[17]

What Paul (and the post-Pauline communities after him) do is to change the contemporary Jewish and Greek language in relation to speech about God, the nature of God's interaction with Christians and their access to God, and their interactions with one another (Malina 1981:147-148). In other words, Paul refuses to use the language or symbols of in the same way that contemporary Jews or Greeks do. Instead, for him (and those of the post Pauline tradition) several other interpretative options emerge. (i) The Jerusalem Temple is no longer sacral space. Rather the community or *group* of Christians filled with "the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor.6:19; cf.1Cor.3:16-17) or the "living God" (2 Cor.6:16) are the temple. (ii) In terms of the organization of God's people, purity lines demarcate only insiders from outsiders. All distinguishing lines derived from social status, sexual roles, and ethnicity are eliminated (Gal.3:28; 1 Cor. 12:13; Col.3:11). (iii) Prayer and conduct replace animals or vegetables as sacrifices. It now comes to symbolize the proper relationship between God as patron and Christians as clients (1Thess.5:19-21; Rom.12:1; 15:16; Col.3:16-17; Eph.5:2, 15-20; etc.). (iv) Titles for Christian leaders are taken from the non-sacral sphere of 1st century Jewish and Greek

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[17]However, in the Christian community at *Galatia*, Paul seems to appeal more explicitly to his apostolic authority and example to convince Christians of what was to be truly binding on them in terms of their beliefs and practices. But even here Paul does not appear to contradict the primacy of God's power and revelation, and of life under the control of the Spirit (e.g.1:1- 2:9; 5:1-26). For an important discussion on the meaning of authority from a socio-cultural perspective, see Malina 1986:116-126, 131-138.

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society, and the institutionalized titles of 'religious' leaders are dismissed. For example, 'apostle' is 'authorized messenger'; 'bishop' is 'supervisor', 'overseer' or 'superintendent'; 'presbyter' is 'elder' or 'senior member' or perhaps 'senior in faith'; 'deacon' is 'table-waiter' or 'servant of the establishment'. Each type of leader is defined essentially in terms of their functions rather than their status.[18] (v) All times and seasons are now sacred in light of Jesus' death and resurrection and the new order that has now been ushered in as a result of these events. There is, consequently, no need to "observe days, and months, and seasons, and years" (Gal.4:10).

In terms of the Pauline Christian tradition, then, Malina provides a helpful model to understand the tasks of the early Christian communities relative to the purity rules of 1st century Judaism (cf.Fig.11).

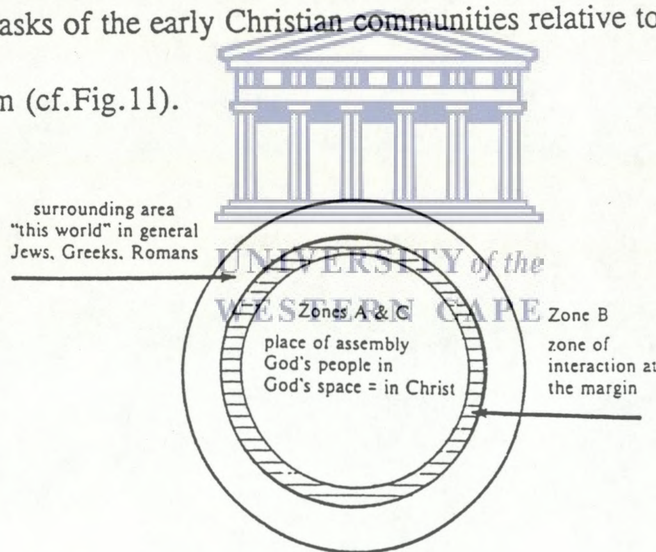

Fig.11. *Redefinition of 1st century Jewish purity lines by the Pauline Christian tradition.* (Adapted from Malina 1981:148)

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[18]Here Malina seems to overlook the possiblity that such titles as 'presbyter' and 'elder' may well have been drawn from the 'sacral' sphere of the Jewish synagogue. But his suggestion that none of these titles were strictly "clerical" or "religious" in the sense that modern readers might understand them is an important one to make (cf.Malina 1981:147-148).

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Firstly, the Christian communities were "to keep this [Christian] body free from what did not fit 'in Christ'". Secondly, they were "to interact at the margins of the body in such a way that it would please God, hence on the basis of the attitudes and actions rooted 'in Christ'". In Fig.11 we see that for Pauline Christians the demarcation of insider and outsider overlays zones A and B which are now combined (cf.Fig.10). And zone B is placed at the margins of the whole (Malina 1981:148).

Fig.12 illustrates how Christian purity lines may be usefully compared with the earlier vertical Temple model (cf.Fig.9) to reflect the former's own distinctive character. In this way the distinctive character of the Christian purity system is more easily understood.

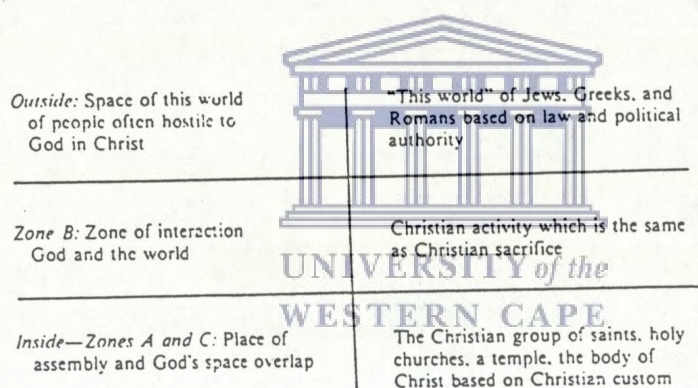

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Fig.12. *Redefinition of 1st Jewish purity rules by Pauline Christianity in terms of Temple spatial categories in fig.9.* (Adapted from Malina 1981:149)

3.2.1.4. *Concluding summary*

By way of concluding this part of our discussion, we may assess Malina's use of Douglas' work on purity and pollution systems and the value of his cultural hermeneutic for understanding and explaining particular NT writings.

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Firstly, Malina has not ignored either historical or theological concerns, nor even the nature of some of their own discoveries regarding the many NT texts which he studies. But he does enhance previous ways of understanding the nature of the attitudes and actions of Jesus and early Christians such as Paul with respect to the entire purity system of 1st century Judaism. Malina has done this by locating such rules within the framework of their proper and broader social purpose and function, rather than seeing them as merely systems of historical or theological beliefs (ideas) within the confines of either 'Jewish' or 'Christian' institutions. He has adequately demonstrated that an understanding of the social system with its variety of symbols within which the NT writings emerged represents one essential context for explaining why Jesus and Paul reflected different attitudes and actions in relation to those of established Judaism at the time. In short, history or theology can no longer ignore the vital place of symbols which emerge from the socio-cultural systems and processes of the 1st century Mediterranean world of the NT writings. These symbolic systems themselves provide an important context for understanding the history and theology revealed in the NT writings. In this regard, Malina has illustrated one way in which the social sciences contribute to a more effective NT exegesis.

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Secondly, Malina has given us a fresh and suggestive approach for dealing with what is ordinarily treated as 'a dull subject', viz., the matter of particular laws, customs and rituals in Judaism and early Christianity. His interpretation of Douglas' sophisticated notions of purity and pollution systems and the language which he uses are accessible to contemporary readers of the NT writings (e.g. in mainstream American society).

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Moreover, his use of numerous illustrative models to demonstrate how purity systems operated in the 1st century Mediterranean world can only help and develop new readings and clearer understandings of the many NT writings on the subject (cf.Malina 1981:151-152).

Thirdly, Malina has not been superficial in his approach by ignoring the real historical and socio-cultural 'distance' between the purity concerns embraced in the ancient culture of the NT texts and those of modern cultures, such as those of mainstream North Americans. He has shown why it is important to recognize that the 'foreign' nature of the NT texts remains an indispensable starting point for a proper or fuller understanding of their meaning. We have noted in this regard that Malina may be tending towards a reductionist interpretation of the NT texts, but we have left this matter for a later discussion in Part 4 of our thesis.

Fourthly, Malina has built into his hermeneutic a self-critical procedure. This helps greatly to reduce (if not to eliminate) the twin dangers of "superficiality and inaccuracy" (cf.Malina 1981:17). Malina also permits and invites a critical testing of his models as to whether or not they move in the direction of an ethnocentric and ideological reading of these texts. It appears that Malina's appropriation of Douglas' cultural models of purity rules prove to be useful explanatory devices for the study of the NT writings within the context of their 1st century social world . They do not appear to distort the fundamental meaning of the NT writings, but rather help in opening up and giving new life to their meaning. Again, we have asked whether or not there is at times the tendency in Malina's approach to reduce what are also ancient Jewish and Christian *theological*

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beliefs and practices to the sphere of socio-cultural explanations often derived from the analysis of relatively more recent cultures.[19]

Fifthly, Malina has not assumed that the purity system of 1st century Judaism is an isolated interpretative framework for understanding the NT writings. He has constantly alluded to other 'cultural scripts' (e.g. kinship and marriage; dyadic personalities; patron-client relations) as equally and indispensably important for the enhancement of a clearer and better interpretation of the NT writings.

3.2.2. Group-Grid, Christian Origins and NT Theology

Malina has made extensive use of Mary Douglas' group-grid model to understand the NT writings within their socio-cultural context of the 1st century Mediterranean world. The fruit of creative work in this area is strongly evident in his important study *Christian Origins and Cultural Anthropology-Practical Models for Biblical Interpretation* (1986). What we mentioned earlier regarding Malina's readiness to adapt, refine and even reinterpret Douglas' purity-pollution model to serve his own method of interpreting the NT writings, pertains equally to his use of her group-grid model.

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While we assume our own descriptive analysis of Douglas' group-grid model as important background to our study of Malina in this section of the thesis, it may be helpful to remind ourselves in a general sense of what he himself defines these concepts to be.

[19]We shall return to this aspect of our assessment once we have looked at Malina's use of Douglas' group-grid model for understanding the NT writings. Cf. 4.2.1.

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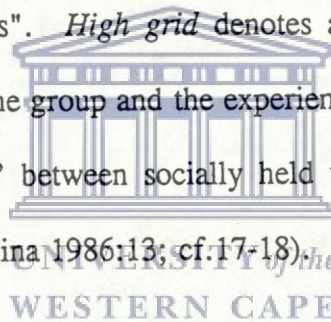
Group refers to "the degree of social pressure exerted on an individual or some subgroup to conform to the demands of the larger society, to stay within the 'we' lines marking off group boundaries". It denotes the degree to which individuals feel and perceive themselves to be embedded within the members of a particular group. *Strong group* denotes a strong feeling and perception of embeddedness, and *weak group* a weak feeling and perception of embeddedness (Malina 1986:13; cf.18-20).

Grid refers "to the degree of socially constrained adherence that persons in a given group usually give to the symbol system-the system of classifications, definitions, and evaluations-through which the society enables its members to bring order and intelligibility to their experiences". *High grid* denotes a high degree of 'fit/match' between socially held values of the group and the experience of the individual, and *low grid* a low degree of 'fit/match' between socially held values of the group and the experience of the individual (Malina 1986:13; cf.17-18).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3.2.2.1. *Social worlds and group-grid*

One important thesis of Malina is that Douglas' group-grid model provides an important heuristic tool for comparative cultural analysis. He maintains that Douglas' model helps us to understand different social worlds and their symbolic or 'cultural scripts' within the given framework of the group-grid matrix. Subsequently, the group-grid model not only gives us insight into the social world of the NT writings, but also into the social world of modern readers of these writings. In this way we are better able to understand the differences in socio-cultural perspectives (distance) between the

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two worlds. More precisely, we are able to understand how and why an appreciation of the different socio-cultural structures, beliefs and practices of the 1st century Mediterranean world is indispensable for an understanding of the NT writings themselves.

Therefore, we are interested to explore in this section (i) what light Malina's hermeneutic sheds on the social worlds of both the NT writings and the modern (North American) readers, and (ii) how his hermeneutical insights help us to understand the NT texts "on their own terms" (Malina 1981:v,1).

In Fig.6, we were introduced to the more complex character of the group-grid model in terms of four quadrants, each with its own particular definition of various 'cultural scripts'.[20] Malina himself identifies and defines some of these 'cultural scripts', for example, purity, rite, personal identity, body, sin, cosmology, and suffering and misfortune more fully (1986:20-27). His aim in doing this is to make these scripts more "serviceable" not only for intelligible inclusion in his own cultural hermeneutic, but also for those modern readers who desire to appropriate his work to understand different social worlds, especially that of the 1st century Mediterranean world within which Christianity and the NT writings had their origins. In addition, Malina incorporates other 'cultural scripts' into his group-grid analysis of social worlds. These are all taken from Douglas' *Cultural Bias* and include nature, gardening, cookery, medicine, time, health, sickness and death (cf.Douglas 1978:22-40; Malina 1986:28-61). His aim here is to extend the descriptive quality of Douglas' group-grid model so that it may prove an even more

[20]Cf. 2.4.2.

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useful and serviceable one for understanding the different social worlds of the 1st century Mediterranean and 20th century North America.

We accept Malina's basic framework that *weak group/high grid* which is characterized, among other things, by a stronger individualism and a high degree of match between values and experiences is most typical of mainstream North American society (Malina 1986:45-54). Particularly with regard to "individualism", North American culture is rather unique among world cultures.[21] Malina implies that the 'cultural scripts' of North American society largely shape (distort?) the modern reader's interpretation of the NT writings. What is needed, therefore, is an understanding of the social world of the NT writings themselves in order to interpret their meaning more accurately and less ethnocentrically.

Particularly significant, then, is Malina's suggestion that *strong group/low grid* characterized, among others, by dyadic personalities and a low degree of match between value and experiences is most descriptive of the 1st century Mediterranean world in which the NT writings were given birth (1986:37-44). "Dyadism", in contrast to the "individualism" of North American culture, is a significant factor governing human relations in 1st Mediterranean society. Malina explains the meaning of dyadic personality:

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[21]Clifford Geertz defines the North American view of the individual "...as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background...." (in Malina 1979:127).

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> What this means is that the person perceives himself or herself as always interrelated to other persons, as occupying a distinct social position both horizontally (with others sharing the same status, ranging from center to periphery) and vertically (with others above and below in social rank)...Every individual is perceived as embedded in some other, in a sequence of embeddedness, so to say (1979:127-128; cf.1981:51-60).

"Dyadic personality" lays stress, therefore, on the primacy of the group (whether family, village, city, or nation) over the individual. In fact, the individual represents the group in these cultures. This means that individual morality or deviance (another term for 'sin'), for example, is not so much the responsibility of the individual as it is the responsibility of the particular group. Malina provides a number of NT texts which appear to support this understanding (1979:130-131).[22]

For our purposes, Malina's overall thesis about the importance of "dyadic personality" in the 1st century Mediterranean world is the significant one to note, especially for an understanding of the NT writings. However, we must briefly mention the cautious and necessary distinctions he makes between the perspective on "dyadic personality" that was common throughout Hellenistic cultures in the 1st century Mediterranean world and the particular perspective of sub-cultures from which the largely Semitic authors of the NT writings came. As Malina explains, the Greek and Roman philosophers spoke of the human make-up in terms of "body and soul,...intellect, will, and conscience,...virtues and vices that fazed one's immortal soul". But the Semitic cultures spoke of the human make-up in terms of "a non-introspective model", comprised of "three mutually interpenetrating yet distinguishable zones of interacting with the environment" (Malina

[22]E.g. Mk.7:21-22 and parr.; Jn.11:50; Rom.1-3, Gal.3:1; 1 Cor.12, Rom.12:3-21, and many more.

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1979:132; 1981:60). These three zones were (i) the zone of emotion-fused thought (utilizing the symbols of eyes, heart, eyelid, pupil), (ii) the zone of self-expressive speech (utilizing the symbols of mouth, ears, tongue, lips, throat, teeth, jaw), and (iii) the zone of purposeful action (utilizing the symbols of hands, feet, arms, fingers, legs). All three provided the framework or implicit pattern for understanding all human (Malina 1979:132-135; 1981:61-63) and divine (Malina 1979:135-138; 1981:64-68) behavior.[23]

Malina also describes other important and related cultural features of the 1st century Mediterranean world that remain as equally important for understanding the NT writings as that of "dyadic personality".[24]

We may sum up three important hermeneutical features which have emerged from Malina's utilization of Douglas' group-grid model for the study of different social worlds, especially those of the NT writings and modern readers of these writings.

Firstly, through a tested form of cross-cultural analysis, Malina has described the differences between the social world of the NT writings and that of the modern North American reader. He has demonstrated how the different 'cultural scripts' of these two social worlds are significant factors, helping to shape the particular structures, beliefs and

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[23]We recognize the importance of Malina's analysis here, although we do not develop it fully in our thesis (cf. 1979:132-137; 1981:60-67; and 3.2.1.3.

[24]These include the pivotal values of honor and shame (1981:25-50; the perception of the limited good (1981:71-93); kinship and marriage (1981:94-121), and of course, purity and pollution (1981:122-154) which received more detailed analysis earlier (cf.3.2.1.). Each of these 'cultural scripts', as Malina's studies demonstrate, has direct implications for understanding the (different) nature of human relations and interactions as well as the meaning of early Christian beliefs in the 1st century Mediterranean world.

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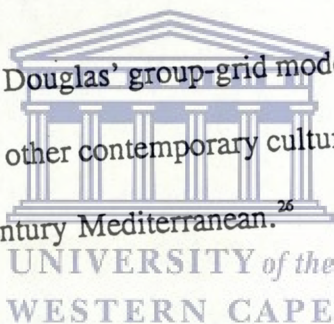
practices in each context. These 'cultural scripts' also provide knowledge which enhance the understanding of these very structures, beliefs and practices.[25]

Secondly, Malina's use of Douglas' group-grid model has described the nature of the cultural distance which exists between the NT writings in its social world and the modern readers of these writings in their social world. In so doing, he has helped us not only to take the fact of this cultural distance seriously, but also provided a way (model) to overcome the cultural distance of meaning which exists between the different social worlds. We may now be in a better position "to hear the meaning of the [NT] texts in terms of the cultural contexts in which they were originally proclaimed" (Malina 1981:v).

Thirdly, Malina's use of Douglas' group-grid model suggests the strong possibility of comparative studies between other contemporary cultures (especially those of the Third World) and those of the 1st century Mediterranean.[26]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3.2.2.2. *Socio-cultural change and group-grid*

Malina is not merely interested in stereotyping particular societies (in this case, mainstream North American and 1st century Mediterranean societies) in terms of a static

[25]Malina and Neyrey provide a more detailed and illuminating comparison of U.S. and Mediterranean cultural views which are helpful for understanding not only the particular cultural features of each respective society, but also the differences between the two (1988:145-151).

[26]We do not address this issue in our thesis, except to mention how important it may prove for further testing the value and utility of Malina's cultural hermeneutic. Cf. 4.2.3.2.,n.10.

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view of various 'cultural scripts'. He is vitally concerned, as is Douglas, with understanding how and why individuals or sub-groups within the mainstream of various societies change their location by moving from one type of social environment to another. Malina suggests that this socio-cultural change is itself significant for further understanding the nature and meaning of particular structures, beliefs and practices in these different societies. Our aim is to explore (i) how Malina's cultural hermeneutic explains the nature of socio-cultural change, and (ii) how it demonstrates the importance of this phenomenon for a more helpful understanding of Christian origins and NT theology.

We have already alluded to some mainstream cultural features of both North American and 1st century Mediterranean societies. Now we illustrate how, for Malina, certain sub-groups emerge within each of these societies with 'cultural scripts' often very different from those of the mainstream. Also, we show how and why individuals and/or sub-groups in each society change group and grid affiliations from those which typify members of the mainstream (cf.Malina 1986:37-54).

Malina observes that there are present in mainstream North American society those who do not reflect the typical cultural features of weak group/high grid. For example, the Amish, Hutterite groups, many closed ethnic groups and personnel in the military represent 'collectivities' which are more typical of strong group/high grid. At the other extreme are most adolescents (college-age youth) in North America who move 'down grid' towards weak group/low grid The reason is that they perceive the dominant 'cultural scripts' of (mostly adult) mainstream North American society as "somewhat

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contrived". Consequently, there develops a low 'fit' between their own values, perceptions and experiences on the one hand, and those of mainstream North Americans on the other. Other examples of 'grid drops' are the Hippies of the 1950s and the Yippies of the 1960s, as well as many new churches and cult groups which have arisen across North America.

Malina proceeds to show that most often movements from the mainstream society such as those just mentioned are temporary in nature. Soon most individuals and sub-groups move back 'up grid' into mainstream North American society. Examples of this movement are the many adolescents when they move into adulthood, what happened in the case of many in the Hippie and Yippie eras, and what typically occurs when military personnel move back into civilian life. Alter-native movements to those just described are also set up, some sub-groups may move to strong group/low grid, and in more extreme cases to strong group/high grid, in which case they become more tightly knit, closed and permanent. This appears to be true of such groups as the Amish.

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In the 1st century Mediterranean world there are similar examples of individuals and/or sub-groups which differ from the dominant 'cultural scripts' of their societies (cf.Malina 1986:37-44). It may be helpful to list, firstly, those groups which generally fit the social type of strong group/low grid. These include most of those groups of people who were under Roman imperial domination in the various cities such as Corinth, Thessalonika, Ephesus, Philippi and Colossae, as well as those groups in the particular cities of the Middle East such as Jerusalem, Antioch and Alexandria. Important groups in 1st century Palestine who may be located in strong group/low grid include the

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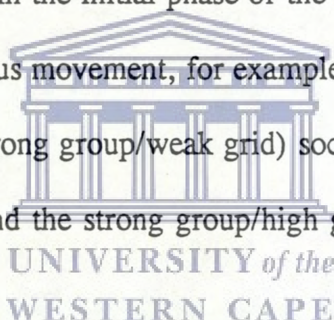
Pharisees, the Zealots, and the Jesus movement. All of them refused to accept collaboration with Rome. Exceptions to those groups within strong group/weak grid were those who were more typically strong group/high grid, viz., the Jewish elites co-opted by Rome such as the Herodians and the Sadducees.

For people in the strong group/low grid societies of the 1st century Mediterranean world, as has been true for those in more contemporary societies, change results primarily from a move 'up grid'. Examples of groups who made such shifts, chiefly in a conceptual and structural sense, are the early Christian movements associated with people such as Jesus and Paul. In modern society, we have the movements conceived by people such as Marx and Lenin, at least in the initial phase of the movements. The reason for the 'up grid' movement of the Jesus movement, for example, was the belief of Jesus that a transformation of the larger (strong group/weak grid) society was essentially possible through the future rule of God and the strong group/high grid transformation that God would effect.[27]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Yet it appears from a study of the 1st century Mediterranean world of the Jesus movement, that most groups of people continued to remain in strong group/low grid, thereby not accepting the vision of Jesus and people such as Paul for the transformation of their world.

[27]Malina's explanations with regard to the 'up grid' future vision of Jesus are supported by the following example which he provides. When the Christian movement eventually came to be firmly embedded within the strong group/high grid matrix of the Roman Empire, people such as Justinian, in the 6th century, could speak of the Christian church as "God's kingdom on earth". Today, the phrase of Justinian is most typical of strong group/high grid theologians, the names of which Malina refuses to mention! (1986:44).

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But Malina is particularly challenging in his suggestion of how individuals from strong group/weak grid societies "become disembedded from the strong group and slide along the group axis into the weak group side. In that location the initially lone individual can entertain new visions of life, the weak group/low grid perspective" (Malina 1986:44).

We evaluate briefly the significance of what Malina is saying by reference to the earliest phase of Christian origins in terms of weak group/low grid features.[28] He explains that "[w]eak group/low grid generates alternate values while strong group/low grid develops alternate structures. Values mark general directions of behavior while structures are social means for realizing values" Malina 1986:96; cf.1986:56). Malina argues that low grid individuals such as John the Baptist, Jesus of Nazareth and Paul of Tarsus could have drawn their initial vision of social structural change from a short-time experience by each of them in a weak group/low grid environment.[29]

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[28]It is important to note here that Malina differs from Douglas' *later* description of weak group features, notably her description of weak group/high grid in *Cultural Bias* (1978:20-21; cf.Fig.4 and Malina 1986:44-54). Malina shows that Douglas' definition of weak group/high grid in this later paper differs from her description of it in her first edition of *Natural Symbols* (1970). This has subsequently caused confusion among scholars of her work, and so even led to their rejection of her model. The problem with Douglas' later description of weak group/high grid is that it in fact describes the lowest rank of strong group/high grid, rather than the main feature of this quadrant which is individualism (Malina 1986:45).

[29]Particular NT texts may give credibility to Malina's suggestion here, e.g., in relation to John the Baptist (Mk 1:4-8 and parr.); Jesus (Mt.4:1-16 and parr.); and Paul (Gal.1:11-12,17-18). As Malina further elaborates, weak group/low grid is essentially the type of social environment that spawns visions of a society built on new values and appropriate social structures (1986:96). Moreover, weak group/low grid also has the characteristic of being a "transitional location marked off by ad hoc groups rather than by enduring societies" (Malina 1986:95).

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We sum up what Malina has provided us with so far in is helpful adaptation of Douglas' four-type group and grid model for an understanding the nature of social change both in relation to the world of the NT writings and that world of the modern readers of these writings.

Firstly, Malina has emphasized again the major ways in in which 'cultural scripts' differ when mainstream North American society (the situation of most readers of the NT writings addressed by Malina) are compared with mainstream 1st century Mediterranean society (the social world of the NT authors, writings and communities). The effect of Malina's analysis is to locate the NT texts firmly in the context of the 1st century Mediterranean world, and to secure their character as 'foreign texts' on which we ought not to impose modern day cultural, or even theological descriptions.

Secondly, Malina has helped us to see how movement or change is a vital feature of both types of societies and that these movements or changes arise for very particular reasons. The importance of this emphasis is that we may no longer understand Christian origins within so many of the static historical or theological categories so peculiar to traditional orthodoxy. Nor should we ignore how the dynamics of socio-cultural change may have affected the very form and content of NT theologies, and continues to affect the form and content of present day theologies as well. *Thirdly*, Malina provides helpful insights into how the early Christian movements (notably figured in Jesus of Nazareth and Paul of Tarsus) may have arisen, first as a result of visions of social and structural transformation developed in weak group/low grid environments, and then

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articulated in the context of strong group/low grid in terms expressive of the ideals of strong group/high grid.

3.2.2.3. *Social catchment areas and group-grid*

Malina observes that Douglas' four-type model of group and grid is neither able to explain *all* types of groups in different societies nor why certain movements or changes take place in these societies. He suggests that this particular limitation of Douglas' model may be one reason why her definition of weak group scripts has been so confusing. It cannot adequately explain why "some groups fall into the cracks and do not spill over into adjacent quadrants (Malina 1986:61; see n.28).

At this point, Malina finds it necessary to adapt Douglas' group-grid model in order to take account of "the cracks" of each quadrant. He defines these "cracks" as *social catchment areas* which he sees as "typical of each quadrant" (Malina 1986:61). To illustrate what Malina means by social catchment areas, we refer to his own discussion of some 'high grid' social groups. As Malina explains:

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> [S]ince high grid social scripts call for stratification in somewhat clear forms, some persons, even a majority of persons in a given society, can find themselves at the lowest rung of the high grid ranking or status system. Yet, instead of facing downward to low grid and forming predictable groups, such persons continue facing upward to high grid systems in which they are embedded. These lowest high grid rungs thus form a social catchment area in which one finds both the dropouts of the weak group/high grid quadrant and the lowest stratum of the strong group/high grid script (1986:62).

Particular examples of high grid groups which fall into the strong group/high grid social catchment area include "the untouchables in India, slaves in the Roman Empire,

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and the politically ostracized in the Soviet Empire". But there are also those "individuals who either cannot or will not compete for achievement goals yet who highly value achievement" such as the poor in North America. These individuals occupy the weak group/high grid social catchment area (Malina 1986:62). In short, then, the social catchment areas of 'high grid' societies represent the "extreme cases, the lowest ends of the high grid spectrums" and each possesses its own distinctive 'cultural scripts' (Malina 1986:62-64).

Especially pertinent to our understanding of early Christianity may be Malina's discussion of the equivalent 'low grid' social catchment areas which also arise. The social catchment area of weak group/low grid will be the place of extreme loners in such societies, notably those we designate commonly as 'hermits' (Malina 1986:64; cf.Douglas 1978:41-52).[30] But there are also those persons/groups who come to occupy the social catchment area of strong group/low grid societies, such as "apocalyptic, chiliastic, millenarian, end-of-the-world groups" (Malina 1986:64). A fair number of contemporary NT scholarship may find Malina's treatment of strong group/weak grid social catchment areas helpful, especially in their social science treatment of early Christianity in terms of millenarianism (e.g.Gager 1975; Isenberg 1974; Meeks 1983b).[31]

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[30]Douglas admits that "the hermit's choice" is a case that falls outside the categories of her own group-grid model. However, the hermit receives her treatment because even s/he continues to influence and make some impact on the larger society (1978;18,41).

[31]Although, we must also note that these treatments of early Christianity have been strongly criticised in NT scholarship as well (e.g.Smith 1978; Best 1983; Holmberg 1990).

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In a creative and critical adaptation of Douglas' group-grid model, then, Malina has developed an even more helpful eight-type model, composed now of the original four types of group-grid and the additional four social catchment areas. These eight social types appear to be helpful explanatory devices.

Firstly, Malina's refined model helps to explain the character of different social groups in different societies, especially those who do not reflect or 'fit', in any clear way, the given 'cultural scripts' of the four types of social environments originally identified by Douglas.

Secondly, Malina's eight-type model explains why certain social movements arise in society, for example, those usually associated with apocalypticism or millenarianism. It describes how persons of these groups perceive and react to the dominant 'cultural scripts' of their particular society.

Thirdly, Malina' developed model of group-grid is suggestive of how the earliest Christian writings may have been influenced directly by authors and communities who came from or were associated with the social catchment areas of strong group/low grid societies.

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Malina articulates what he perceives as the overall challenge of social catchment areas for a more accurate cross-cultural study of the NT writings:

> The relevance of this problem for interpreting the New Testament should be quite apparent. For if people in the U.S. live in a weak group/high grid society for the most part with a goodly number of 'poor' in the weak group/high grid catchment area and if the New Testament writings apart from John derive from strong group/low grid groups, then which meanings can be exchanged when a U.S. person reads the Bible? Is he or she really

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> reading the meanings set down in the biblical writings or only reading his or her own meanings into the writings of the Bible (1986:65).[32]

In short, the adapted group-grid model which Malina provides and the questions which he raises further deepen the hermeneutical concerns of NT studies, and help us to develop an even more rigorous, yet creative approach to such studies.

3.2.2.4. *The meaning of fasting: a case-study*

Malina's appropriation of the group-grid model (and several other models used in conjunction with it is thoroughly tested in his analysis of the *meaning of fasting* in the NT writings. In the study that follows we are able to assess the explanatory value and utility of Malina's cultural hermeneutic in terms of a particular aspect of NT theology.

Malina is especially concerned about *why* persons fasted in NT times. He demonstrates how this question has generally been unasked, and therefore, unanswered by NT interpreters. What Malina shows is that earlier hermeneutical approaches to the issue of fasting in the NT writings have focussed most generally on the fact *that* people fasted,[33] and sometimes even on *who* fasted and *how* people fasted.[34] But these approaches have largely ignored "the culturally specific meaning of fasting", that is, its "social

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[32] For Malina's reasons for locating John's gospel in the weak group/low grid quadrant, see 1985:1-56; 1986:55-61.

[33]Malina lists a number of NT texts generally mentioned by these scholars, e.g., Mk. 1:12-13 and parr.; Mk.2:18-20 and parr.; Mk.14:22-25 and parr.; Mt.11:16-19 and parr.; Mt. 6:16-18; Lk. 2:36-37; 18:8-14; Acts 9:9; 13:2-3; 14:23; 23:12-22.

[34]Malina lists a number of important works in this regard (cf.1986:185).

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meaning" (1986:185). He raises some important questions which he believes help us to discover answers to the *social* meaning of fasting:

> Why did first-century Mediterraneans practice the willful non-consumption of food and drink? Why would such behavior be sensible to their contemporaries? How did such behavior fit into some larger frame of understanding of how the world works that would legitimate such non-consumptive behavior (Malina 1986:185).

These questions, applied as they are to the case of fasting, are basic to the entire methodological concern of practitioners who employ the social sciences to interpret the NT writings. It is our aim to understand Malina's hermeneutical method, and to evaluate both its *actual* importance for the study of 'fasting', and its *potential* significance for the study of other issues in NT theology.

Malina's case study of fasting demonstrates a well-developed and tight argument which draws on and, in fact, assumes a great deal of his earlier discussion of other (essentially) symbolic interaction models in *Christian Origins and Cultural Anthropology* (1986:68-184). We only refer to some aspects of his earlier discussion as they are pertinent to his analysis of fasting.[35] In terms of the *etic* perspective of cultural models,[36] Malina observes that "symbolic approaches to explaining human social behavior presuppose that the basic features of human existence are universal...Such universal

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[35]Malina is more strongly drawn to the utility and value of symbolic models than he is to either the structural functionalist or conflict models for analyzing the NT writings and their social world. This is the case here in his study of fasting (1986:190-191), as it is for most of his studies in *The New Testament-insights from cultural anthropology* (1981, cf.18-24).

[36]For a definition of *emic* and *etic* models, and for a discussion of Malina's presuppositions, especially the stress on the 'universal' or the 'common' in a social science approach, cf.1.4.2.

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features include self, others, nature, time, space, and the All that ties them together" (Malina 1986:191).

Malina's starting assumption for his discussion of fasting in the NT writings is expressed as follows: as it is "highly probable that human food/drink consumption is universal", so it "is equally highly probable that human food/drink non-consumption is equally universal, at least in the sense that people do not drink/eat every minute of the day and night" (1986:191). In this way, Malina further infers that food/drink consumption (acceptance) or their non-consumption (refusal) have the power of "natural symbols", reflecting the core values of any society, that is, their boundaries and rules, and the meanings they attach to particular kinds of behavior (1986:191-192; cf.Douglas 1982a; Cohen 1968:508-512).[37]

In relation to fasting, then, the refusal to eat/drink reflects back on the values, boundaries and rules of the society in its entirety. For example, as Cohen expresses it, " when proscriptions concerning the consumption of food are attacked, it can be assumed that significant changes are taking place in the socioeconomic structure of society" (1968:508). From all this, it seems clear that Malina wishes to address the question of food consumption or non-consumption in specific relation to factors and changes which emerge in the socio-cultural sphere. More specifically, he addresses the questions of *how* a particular culture appropriates the symbolic power of fasting, and *why*?

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[37]Beside food/drink, other examples of 'natural symbols' which Malina refers to throughout his study are force, speech and sexual intercourse. In each of these cases, either acceptance or refusal to engage in the particular human behavior has symbolic meaning, reflecting the nature and function of a particular society as a whole.

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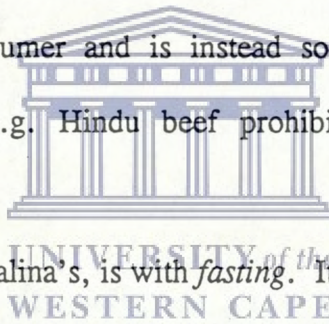
Inevitably, Malina finds answers to these questions through the vehicle of comparative cross-cultural study, and in particular, through the use of "an etic model of fasting" (1986:192). As he explains, "[t]he model is based on the fact that people practice food/drink non-consumption. Such non-consumption may be freely chosen or not freely chosen" (1986:192). When not freely chosen, non-consumption clearly results in hunger and/or starvation. When freely, chosen, non-consumption may assume three different types (Malina 1986:193,196): (i) *abstinence*, which "is intended to have some effect on the non-consumer himself or herself" (e.g.dieting; asceticism, encratism), (ii) *fasting*, which is "intended to have some effect on persons other than the one not consuming" (e.g. see below), and (iii) *avoidance*, where non-consumption "falls beyond the control of the non-consumer and is instead socially commanded" or "socially sanctioned proscriptions" (e.g. Hindu beef prohibition, Jewish and Islamic pork prohibition).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Our concern, as is Malina's, is with *fasting*. It is necessary to understand, then, that fasting , like language is "a form of communication", although the former assumes a "non-linguistic" character. Essentially, in the action of fasting, "food is used as mediating material precisely because the one fasting refuses to use food and expects some other person to understand a message in the refusal" (Malina 1986:196).

In order to understand how communication occurs in the process of social interaction (in this case, in relation to fasting), Malina utilizes his earlier discussion of what he terms "generalized symbolic media of social interaction" or simply GSM

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(cf.1986:77-101; cf.197-198).[38] At a high level of abstraction, Malina finds four types of GSM, (i) *commitment-* which focusses generally on "the belonging system" of a society, represents "the capacity to command loyalty", and is indicative of "the horizontal dimension" of social interaction (e.g. family, kinship, friendship, patron-client), (ii) *influence-* which focusses generally on "the meaning system" of a society, represents "the capacity to persuade", and is indicative of "the depth dimension" of social interaction (e.g. conciliation or consent to the shared meaning system), (iii) *power* -which focusses generally on "the collective effectiveness system" of a society, represents "the capacity to produce conformity", and is indicative of "the vertical dimension" of social interaction (e.g. all forms of government), and (iv) *inducement-* which focusses generally on "the economic system" of a society, represents "the capacity to expropriate goods and services", and is indicative of "the mass/quantity dimension" (e.g. money [in the U.S.] and birth status [in 1st cent. Mediterranean society]).

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In the framework of these GSM of social interaction, fasting would mean the refusal to participate in the media of commitment, influence, power, and inducement. And "since these media are not only means of social exchange but also institutionally specific channels of communication, then a refusal to embody the media implies a rejection of the institution in which they are rooted" (1986:198). At this point of his argument, Malina appropriates Douglas' replication theory, more directly, her discussion of how the physical body replicates the social body, in order to explain the replicating

[38]As indicated earlier, we can only focus on the most essential parts of Malina's discussion in this regard, specifically as these relate to fasting.

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power inherent in the act of fasting (Malina 1986:199-200; cf.Douglas 1982a:65-81).[39]

Malina asks, "[w]hat is the message communicated by fasting?". And he replies:

> As a form of communicative non-consumption, fasting means a negation of the reciprocities that make up social interaction. As refusal to reciprocate, fasting places the one not consuming 'out of social bounds', outside of the normal limits that define social interaction. Generally speaking, then, fasting denotes the refusal to reciprocate in the area of consumption, i.e., meaningful goods exchange...Moreover, the practice of group fasting necessarily entails the rejection of reciprocities with other groups and their members and thus further highlights group boundaries...Such transitions occur as the social expression of the hoped-for status reversal or of the request for status transformation (Malina 1986:200).

We now examine Malina's discussion in relation to fasting as it emerges in the context of the NT writings, and more particularly, within the context of strong group/ low grid social world of 1st Mediterranean society where "boundary maintenance" and "self-definition" derived essentially from group affiliation. Malina refers, of course, to "dyadic persons" in 1st century Mediterranean society.[40] In this society,

> fasting would be a form of communication directed vertically to God to see to boundary maintenance and directed horizontally to one's group members to symbolize group affiliation. What provokes the fast is the perception of status reversal- the negative estimate of the state in which the group finds itself. This negative estimate might range from a panic-provoking perception of boundary porosity to the certainty of an all-suffusing and firmly lodged evil (Malina 1986:202).

Yet, a study of fasting in the NT texts, reveal a number of interesting features, two of which are mentioned here. (i) The Jesus group refuses to fast, in almost all cases

[39]Cf. 2.3.1. for our discussion of Douglas' hypothesis regarding the (physical) body as metaphor or image of society.

[40]Cf. 3.2.2.1.

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(cf.Mk.2:18-20; Lk.18:9-14). In this way, the Jesus group demonstrated its *unconcern* for boundary maintenance of the group in the sense that such a concern was typical of all other Jewish groups of significance in that society (Malina 1986:202). (ii) The Matthean group focussed on fasting, but laid stress on the vertical dimension of this act, in relation of God, while emphasizing the hidden horizontal (or public) dimension of group boundary maintenance (cf. Mt.6:16-18).[41]

But two questions still remain, "[i]n what social context did fasting have its primary locus?" and 'why did Jesus come (with one exception) to reject the act of fasting?" (Malina 1986:202-203).

The answer to the first question is found in an analysis of Matthew's discussion of fasting in terms of "mourning" (e.g.Mt.9:14-15; 11:16-19), and Luke's discussion of fasting in terms of "weeping" (e.g. Lk.7:31-35). According to Malina, "[b]oth mourning/weeping statements refer to a line of behavior protesting the presence of evil and having fasting as integral parts. .The evil in question is whatever triggers the perception of a need of status reversal" (1986:203). And Matthew, for example, "discovers and assesses the evil requiring mourning behavior as the lack of righteousness, that is, proper interpersonal relations in the social body" (Malina 1986:203). In light of the above, then, Jesus would most likely have practised fasting as a member of the John the Baptist group, where evil was also defined in terms of a lack of righteousness as just described. But Jesus' breakaway or 'conversion' to form the Jesus group led also

[41]Cf. Mk.2:18-20; Mt.11:16-19/ Lk.7:31-35; Mt.6:16-18.

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to his refusal to continue the practice of fasting (Malina 1986:203; cf.Hollenbach 1982:196-219).

This leads naturally to the second question regarding why Jesus refused to fast? Malina finds the answer in Jesus' more *positive*, or what we may denote as the *reforming* character of his movement. Jesus rejected fasting because the form it took among other groups was the refusal by its members to interact with God and the neighbor as significant others. Instead, Jesus encouraged "[t]he positive injunctions to go out to others and to mix with others". That is, Jesus rejected the "defensiveness relative to boundaries", but rather stressed "openness" as that which was most important for governing the relations that people had with God and with the neighbor. In this sense, then, fasting was unnecessary, because in Jesus status reversal and status transformation had either begun or was somehow already realized (Malina 1986:203).[42]

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In his case-study of fasting from a social science perspective, Malina has suggested a number of useful explanations of this specific practice as it is described in the NT writings.

Firstly, Malina provides an illuminating approach to understanding *why* the people described in NT text-segments either fasted (e.g. all significant Jewish groups), fasted in a different way from that of most other Jewish groups (e.g. the Matthaen group) or essentially refused to fast (e.g. the Jesus group).

[42]We do not examine the one exception in which Jesus does declare his intent to fast, viz., Mk.14:22-25. Cf. Malina 1986:203-204 for a discussion of this point.

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Secondly, Malina has placed fasting within the category of 'communication' of society as a whole. In so doing, he has demonstrated something which the historical or theological methods do not, viz., that the act of fasting was not merely 'abstinence' from food/drink, nor an 'avoidance' of food/drink, but rather a refusal to participate in the reciprocities that constituted all social interactions in 1st century Mediterranean society, between people and God, and between people and the neighbor. Furthermore, fasting encoded "a message of request of status reversal" (Malina 1986:204). In light of this, we may better understand that Jesus' refusal to fast was his declaration of intent for a new and open basis of social interaction with God and with the neighbor. Jesus also offered the means of status reversal considered so important in Palestinian society, but through participation in his reforming movement and vision rather than through fasting.

Thirdly, Malina provides us insight into why the rejection of fasting, especially on the part of the Jesus group, was a problem for other Jewish groups. For such an act of rejection, from the perspective of those who favored its practice, indicated either an "acquiescence to the status quo"[43] or a (false) "perception that the requested status reversal has already been realized in some way" (Malina 1986:204).[44]

Fourthly, Malina's hermeneutic enables an *actual* understanding of the meaning of fasting in a way that incorporates historical, theological, sociological and

[43]This explains the recriminations of "sinner, glutton, drunkard" levelled at the Jesus group to shame them (e.g. Mt.11:16-19; Lk.7:31-35).

[44]This explains why other Jewish groups reacted against the Jesus group's non-fasting since the latter's actions communicated the wrong message.

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anthropological concerns. It also suggests a new approach to understanding and explaining the meaning of other beliefs and practices articulated in NT theology.[45]

We now offer a brief concluding summary of Malina's cultural anthropological hermeneutic. We do this by evaluating his use of Douglas' models in light of our descriptive analysis of her work in Part 2.

3.3. Malina Versus Douglas : A Brief Evaluation

Our discussion need only be brief, in terms of four major points of comparison. *Firstly*, Malina's studies of the NT writings and its social world have demonstrated the immense utility and explanatory power of Douglas' models for such a task. His discussion of purity concerns in 1st century Palestine and of early Christian attitudes and actions in relation to these concerns have provoked interest in the many other challenges of Douglas' theoretical constructs for NT interpretation. Furthermore, Douglas' group-grid model has been shown to be a good *etic* model for the cross-cultural analysis of the NT writings. It helps contemporary readers both to take seriously and address the hermeneutical problem of *continuity* and *distance* which exists between them and their social world on the one hand, the world of the NT texts and their social world on the other. But the group-grid model also helps the contemporary reader to gain entry into the 'foreign' world of the NT (a theological concern of Barth), but without sacrificing either historical or socio-cultural concerns deemed so vital for a proper understanding of the NT

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[45]Among these we may list Jesus' and/or Paul's attitude to (i) Jewish law (ii) prayer (iii) sex and marriage, and (iv) the use of force or violence.

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texts themselves. In this sense Malina has exploited with good effect the ability and virtue of cultural anthropological models to describe and explain the continuity and distance between different socio-cultural worlds.

Secondly, Malina has not become a slave to Douglas' models. On occasions he has differed sharply from what he thinks is her inaccurate and confusing descriptions (e.g. in the case of weak groups). At other times, Malina has noted the limitations of Douglas' models, something she herself often admitted and sought on numerous occasions to rectify.[46] But he has gone on to develop Douglas' models in highly creative ways. For example, his use of social catchment areas has sought to take better account of the more complex nature of different social worlds and of social interaction and social change in such social worlds. Also, Malina's exploration of the meaning of fasting in NT text-segments has greatly extended and deepened the explanatory framework of Douglas' group-grid model. By utilizing other symbolic models of analysis (e.g. GSM of social interaction), Malina has demonstrated that *why* people (of the NT world) fasted or refused to fast has reasons and implications which are unable to be understood apart from the broader socio-cultural concerns of their world. As such, Malina's hermeneutic has strong potential for a more critically accurate and creative study of many other aspects of Christian origins and NT theology.

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Thirdly, both Douglas and Malina demonstrate a stronger affinity for symbolic models of cross-cultural analysis. Certainly they have both demonstrated the utility of

[46]Cf. Part 2. Here we were reminded of how Douglas' models developed over time as well as her struggle to articulate a cross-cultural model which could more accurately describe the different societies which she studied.

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symbolic models and how indispensable these models this kind of analysis. In fact, Malina's cultural hermeneutic has suggested the importance of the *symbolic* nature of culture and, especially, the significance of such symbols for embodying the meaning of the language in the NT writings. But we must ask whether both Douglas and Malina have not undercut the vital importance of conflict models. Of course, Malina uses conflict models in his analysis of the NT writings and assumes the importance of all (three) models for a proper study of the NT writings (cf.1981: 20-23). However, his bias towards symbolic models might be ignoring (more than he thinks) what other scholars consider the deeply influential material and ideological conditions which engendered conflicts in the 1st century social world of the NT writings. These conflicts would also have great bearing on the very nature of NT theology itself (cf. Mosala 1989; Mayer 1983). Related to this issue, Malina's hermeneutic, by laying stress on the 'foreign' nature of the NT texts for contemporary (mainly) North American readers, might be downplaying their 'familiarity' for readers of these texts in many Third World countries where conflict is a daily reality.

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We proceed in the final part of our thesis to a critical appraisal of social science methods of NT interpretation. In so doing, we return particularly to a more detailed evaluation of the interpretative methods of both Douglas and Malina.

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PART FOUR

SOCIAL SCIENCE METHODS AND NEW TESTAMENT INTERPRETATION: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL

4.1. Introductory

Our critical survey of some contemporary methods of biblical interpretation in the first part of this thesis left an unfinished task. We did not provide a critical appraisal of the social science methods themselves. Our descriptive analysis of the cultural anthropology of Mary Douglas (Part 2) and our critical description and evaluation of the hermeneutic of Bruce Malina as he utilizes some of Douglas' models for the study of the NT writings (Part 3) now provide us with a better framework within which to evaluate specific aspects of social science methods.

We concluded our first discussion of the social science methods in Part 1 by raising three main questions about these methods themselves. Briefly, these are: (i) Do the social science methods succumb to a form of reductionism? (ii) Are the social science methods and their practitioners ideologically captive to the ideas and values of Western culture and scholarship? (iii) Do the social science methods suggest either an 'advance' or a 'paradigm shift' in NT interpretation? We now address these questions directly, focussing particularly on the work of Mary Douglas and Bruce Malina.

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4.2. A Critical Appraisal

4.2.1. The question of reductionism

The charge of reductionism has been directed at social science methods and their practitioners in a number of general ways. The two main charges focus on the tendency of social science methods to either ignore or neglect the (i) *religious* and (ii) *literary* dimensions of the NT writings.

In terms of the first charge, some scholars feel that practitioners of the social science methods may be denying or downplaying the biblical writings as "supernatural and spiritual phenomena" because they treat them too much like *social* productions (Holmberg 1990:147). As Benton Johnson explains in relation to a modern sociological theory of religion:

> ...it fosters analyses that must appear reductionistic to anyone who takes religious ideas seriously on their own terms. Sociological explanations of religion have the effect of explaining it away. They carry the inescapable implication that religious ideas are not true (in Holmberg 1990:148).

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Thomas Best presents much the same criticism in a slightly different way:

> Sociology as such considers only the human dimension in human behaviour, and systematically eliminates the trans-human factors (1983:192).

Best insists on "the importance of the faith-dimension" in any sociological analysis of NT texts (1983:192).[1] Though the criticisms of Holmberg, Johnson and Best have a great measure of truth to them, they do not focus the question of reductionism in relation to the

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[1]When we discussed Karl Barth's theological method, we saw a similar concern for viewing the biblical writings as the evidence of faith and revelation, and not merely as historical productions as most liberal scholars had presumed at the time. See 1.3.

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religious dimension sharply enough. For example, Best's argument that sociology only considers the "human dimension in human behaviour" while eliminating the "trans-human" (or religious) dimension is not helpful. It may be more accurate to consider whether or not sociology only considers certain dimensions of what it is to be human, and whether or not this may lead sociologists or their methods to exclude other specifically religious dimensions of what it is to be human.

In terms of the second charge of reductionism, scholars of the *new literary criticism* of the Bible argue that social science methods and their practitioners subordinate the literary considerations of biblical texts by their often exclusive stress on a reconstruction of the social world of these texts (cf.Gottwald 1985:21,21-26; cf.Macky 1986:263-279). Instead, new literary critics wish to give primary attention to "the depth dimension" or "literary/aesthetic dimension" of the Bible which has long been neglected (Macky 1986:267,269; cf.Via 1969; Wilder 1971; Ryken 1974; Perrin 1976; Tolbert 1979; Ricoeur 1976; Croatto 1987).

We may sum up, then, why practitioners of the new literary approach find the social science methods reductionistic. They maintain that these methods tend to subordinate the power of meaning in the written texts to the agenda of historical or socio-cultural interests. The whole question of the *meaning* of the NT texts and where such meaning comes from is held up for sharp debate.

Though we acknowledge the importance of the general tenor of criticism brought against the social science methods and their practitioners in terms of their reductionist tendencies, it is not our intention to respond to all of them. Rather we wish to concretize

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our discussion by giving specific attention to the cultural anthropological methods of Mary Douglas and Bruce Malina. Do their methods demonstrate the tendencies toward reductionism we have just expressed? In other words, do Douglas and Malina neglect or ignore the religious and literary dimensions of texts by a too exaggerated focus on their socio-cultural dimensions? While we address the methods of both Douglas and Malina in terms of the place they give to religious (theological) questions, it is only Malina's method that receives attention in terms of literary questions.[2]

4.2.1.1. *The religious question*

Our discussions of Douglas (Part 2) and Malina (Part 3) affirm that both scholars are *primarily* concerned with questions of a socio-cultural nature. But it is certain that such considerations do not exclude the strictly *religious* questions. Douglas herself possesses a cultural perspective that includes the religious or sacred dimension as one inseparable part of what it means to be human in any society. Her holistic approach to culture is itself a criticism of how so many scholars have misused the social sciences (especially cultural /social anthropology) in the West, especially by their separation of the sacred and the secular dimensions of human existence.

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Adopting a perspective similar to Douglas, Malina remains critical of attempts in Western society to divorce religious issues from socio-cultural issues, especially in the reading of the NT writings. More particularly, he wishes to overcome the tendency of

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[2]This is because literary concerns (i.e. texts) remain tangential to Douglas' greater interest with actual cultures. Malina clearly grounds much of his analysis in the study of the NT texts themselves.

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Western readers to impose their own religious or socio-cultural perspectives on the NT texts. Therefore, he would maintain against Johnson that anyone who takes religious ideas seriously on their own terms must give attention necessarily to the socio-cultural milieu in which these religious ideas have been expressed and find meaning.

However, this does not mean that either the comments or studies of Douglas and Malina escape altogether the charge of reductionism in relation to the religious question. Certain statements of Douglas suggest that her cultural perspective does reflect reductionist tendencies. For example, there is her assumption that "we should be able to say what kinds of universe are likely to be constructed when social relations take this or that form" in any society (Douglas 1973:9). As Isenberg explains by reference to the above quote from Douglas:

> Douglas sometimes reads like a social determinist suggesting that the structures of interpersonal relationships are determinative of ideological and religious structures, a kind of sociological Marxist (1980:47).

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But Douglas herself is rather sensitive to the issue of reductionism. While her entire methodology generally "derives cosmologies from social environments, she does not claim that she understands the precise causal connections" (Isenberg 1980:47). Rather more cautiously she writes:

> In any social context, it may be assumed that the chains of cause and effect between the structures of social interaction and cosmological and cultural systems which are supporting them are indefinitely interwoven and interdependent (Douglas 1978:53).

Again, in her awareness that human beings create their own environments and create the structures within which their beliefs, practices and experiences flow and find meaning,

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she also allows for the freedom of individuals to differ from or comply with socially constructed realities (Isenberg 1980:32-33; cf.Douglas 1978:6).

Perhaps, the words of Isenberg and Owen are more helpful in assessing Douglas' view of culture and her perspective on the religious question. They remind us that "any model which attempts to bring order to human experience" tends towards some form of reductionism, especially "if it is not used carefully and responsibly" (1977:8). Our study of Douglas' cultural anthropological method and the insights derived from using this method (Part 2), together with the cautious comments from her work just mentioned, suggest that she is indeed careful and responsible in her use of models when studying cultural phenomena. In this sense she does seem to escape the harsher charges of reductionism directed at the sociological (and anthropological) approaches by such scholars as Johnson and Best.

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We must now evaluate Malina's methodology in terms of its response to the religious question. Malina has been quite convincing in his demonstration of how indispensable social and cultural factors are for understanding religious (theological) issues in society, especially the society in which the NT writings were conceived and expressed. But has Malina not focussed too much on socio-cultural issues so as to subordinate religious or theological concerns? As we have seen in our discussion of Malina's work in Part 3, he often assumes that the meaning of NT texts, including their theological meaning, is derived from their social system, principally that of the 1st century Mediterranean world.[3]

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[3]Later, we shall have to address this apparent problem in Malina's hermeneutical

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However, it seems that Malina, like Douglas, is sensitive to the charge of reductionism as he is to the charge of ethnocentrism. He avoids saying explicitly, or suggesting in the many applications of his cultural hermeneutic that social and cultural factors *determine* religious or theological beliefs and practices in any absolute or unqualified sense. Moreover, our study of his work, particularly on Christian understandings of purity and fasting, demonstrates how Malina is clearly concerned with NT theological concerns, albeit in a different way from that of many practitioners of the historical or theological methods. The overall thrust of his argument remains an important one. We should reject any position that separates theological questions from their rootedness in some socio-cultural context. Malina's argument is a pertinent one, therefore, for the theological studies of the NT. Indeed, any separation of the social-cultural and theological dimensions of the NT writings would be akin to another form of reductionism, viz., a denial of the Incarnation (cf.Malina 1981:153-154). In the conclusion to his many cultural anthropological studies in *The New Testament World*, Malina states how he has attempted all along to avoid this form of reductionism.

> This book is meant to help in understanding the New Testament writings. If those writings are to resonate in our different cultural context, if faith is to be held responsibly, then theology will have to carry out its work of articulating the culture-bond, original symbols of the primordial Christian movement in terms of the clearest language and models that it can find in the cultures in which it is to be expressed, understood, and lived out (1981:154).

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perspective. Cf. 4.2.1.2.

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In similar vein to Douglas, then, Malina does not seem to be guilty of an excessive reductionism, especially if this charge means that he has ignored or neglected the religious dimension of human existence.

We may sum up our discussion of reductionism in relation to the religious question. While both Douglas and Malina are not completely free of reducing religious questions to their consideration within socio-cultural systems, they do not neglect nor ignore the central importance of religious (theological) concerns. Furthermore, both Douglas and Malina would maintain that these religious (theological) questions be approached, not independently from, but rather through a direct appeal to their location within the framework of society as a whole.

4.2.1.2. *The literary question*

As we indicated earlier, we shall focus exclusively on Malina's cultural methodology in our assessment of whether or not social science methods ignore or neglect the literary dimensions of the NT texts. In our earlier discussion of Malina's cultural hermeneutic, we noted that his understanding of the meaning of NT texts tends towards some form of reductionism. He has often suggested that the meaning of the NT texts are derived from the social system of the 1st century Mediterranean world. In this sense, Malina appears to have ignored the literary considerations of the NT texts, especially the form in which new literary critics would express them.

In contrast to the practitioners of both historical and social science approaches, those of the new literary school of biblical interpretation insist that these texts are firstly,

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if not exclusively, "a literary medium", that is, "words that conjure up their own imaginative reality" (Gottwald 1985:22). As such, the biblical text itself, rather than any historical, theological or socio-cultural analysis of the biblical text "constitutes the proper object of study in that it offers a total, self-contained, literary meaning quite independent of the other forms of analysis" (Gottwald 1985:22).

This does not mean that all practitioners of a new literary method are alike in their perspective regarding other hermeneutical methods. For example, Paul Ricoeur clearly shares the perspective of other new literary critics when he lays greater stress on the *written* text rather than its historicity as the fundamental starting point for its interpretation. But he is not unaware of the central problem of historical (and socio-cultural) distance which separates the ancient text from the contemporary reader who appropriates these texts (1976).

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Similarly, J. Severino Croatto emphasizes the supreme importance of "textual dependency" in biblical interpretation, that is, that "[e]very textual interpretation has to begin with the text" (1987:29). But he nuances his literary method with due appreciation for what he designates as a threefold *distantiation* (i) between language and speech (1987:15), (ii) between speech (discourse) and text (1987:36), and (iii) between text and (re)reading of the text (1987:32-34). For Croatto, these distantiations constitute "the hermeneutic function" (1987:34-3). They not only unfold a *hermeneutical process* which is intrinsic to the meanings of texts themselves, but they also represent the *hermeneutical fecundity* of texts which is their ability to both accumulate meanings and create new meanings (Croatto 1987:66-67). Moreover, Croatto wishes to discover the dialectic

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which exists between the text and the contextual situation of the contemporary reader of the text so that the *liberation* meaning of the text can be more readily appropriated.

New literary approaches, therefore, challenge the historical and social science methods, especially when these methods emphasize (in any exclusivist or primary sense) the locus of meaning 'behind' the text. Croatto, for example, affirms the foremost importance of the 'forward' meanings of texts, that is, those meanings opened up in new contexts as texts are reread (1987:7-9,37,50). "The text contains a reservoir of meaning, ever exploited and never exhausted" (Croatto 1987:30).

Ricoeur insists that meaning is found essentially 'in front of' the text, that is, in the meaning which the text itself opens up in the process of interpretation (1976:81,92-94). More explicitly stated, the *sense* (the *what* of the text) and its *reference* (the *about what* of the text) is "not the initial situation of discourse, but what it points towards" (Ricoeur 1976:88). Therefore, the challenge for hermeneutics is clearly expressed by Ricoeur:

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> Understanding has less than ever to do with the author and his situation. It seeks to grasp the world-propositions opened up by the reference of the text. To understand a text is to follow its movement from sense to reference; from what it says, to what it talks about" (1976:2).

Ricoeur has made use of the French structural analysis of texts which distinguishes between *langue* (the set of codes which underlie the text and give it the capacity to engender meaning) and *parole* (the particular meaning/message which the text itself engenders). Given this perspective, Ricoeur would argue that while historical and social

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science methods, as they are applied to the NT writings, succeed in understanding the *langue* of these texts, they do not appreciate the importance of their *parole*.

The main question we must now address is whether or not Malina has ignored or neglected the literary aspects of the NT texts. In Part 3 of our thesis we observed that Malina is conversant with and draws on a sociolinguistic analysis. Clearly, this kind of analysis of texts includes the literary dimensions of texts which are considered. From this it follows that Malina does not reject *apriori* the literary dimensions of texts. But true to the sociolinguistic perspective, Malina considers the literary dimensions of the NT texts within the framework of their socio-cultural systems.

Consequently, it appears that Malina remains interested in the literary dimensions of the NT writings, but in a sense quite different from that of new literary critics. His primary concern, at least in the context of his work which we have studied earlier, has been with the socio-cultural formation of the texts in relation to the social world from which such texts ultimately derived their meaning.[4] Furthermore, there is no sense in Malina's hermeneutic that the NT texts "accumulate" and "create new meanings" as Croatto suggests (cf.1987:66-67). For Malina the NT texts themselves really have one meaning, and this meaning is supplied by a proper understanding of the socio-cultural world in which the texts originated and were proclaimed (cf.Malina 1981:v,1).

We raise one more question which new literary critics may direct to Malina. Has he not ignored an important dimension regarding the formation of the NT texts, that is,

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[4]In his sociolinguistic perspective on the Gospel of John, however, Malina demonstrates greater interest in and awareness of new literary critical issues such as story and emplotment (cf.1985).

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the freedom and ability of the individual NT writers to have selected particular forms of literary expressions from the broader range of options (codes) that their social world may have suggested? New literary critics would maintain that the specific literary expressions of the individual writers are (at least) as important for understanding the meaning of the NT texts and the world they open up as is a more general understanding of the socio-cultural world in which these texts emerged.

In response to this question, we must assume that Malina's knowledge and use of linguistic theory makes him familiar with the fact that the individual NT writers were in some way free to have selected particular forms of meaning from a broader range of possible meanings in their respective contexts.[5] But this possibility is less emphasized in his NT studies which we have analyzed. Malina's main concern has been with the social system which provided the code(s) of meaning for the texts and the "common domain of reference" of the texts with which both writer and reader of these texts were familiar and to which both could appeal (1986:5). Also, he does not want to suggest that a literary criticism of these writings are insignificant, but rather maintains in more modest fashion that

> [m]odels from cultural anthropology do not offer an alternative explanation of the Bible, nor do they do away with literary critical, historical, and theological study. Rather, they add a dimension not available from other methods, along with a way to check on the hunches of interpreters when it comes to questions of social context (Malina 1981:v).

[5]Cf. his use of Bernstein (1973) and Halliday (1978) in particular.

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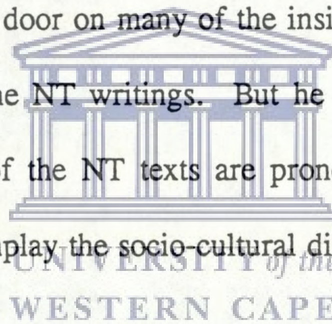
What Malina is suggesting is that the information (meaning) which he derives from the NT texts through the use of cultural anthropological models might reinforce and develop rather than hinder or eliminate the task of literary critics.

We may sum up our discussion of reductionism in relation to the literary question by acknowledging that Malina at times leans towards a form of reductionism. This is especially evident in his occasional and rather suggestive references that the social system virtually determines the meaning of NT texts. However, his overall application of cultural anthropological models to the NT texts reflects in more modest fashion that, for him, the socio-cultural context is but one important, if indispensable determiner of textual meaning. He does not shut the door on many of the insights which new literary critics bring to an understanding of the NT writings. But he would insist that new literary critics and theological critics of the NT texts are prone to reductionism themselves, especially as both deny or downplay the socio-cultural dimension of these texts.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4.2.1.3. *Concluding summary*

We are aware that we have not altogether solved the question of reductionism, especially as it relates to the cultural anthropological methods of Douglas and Malina. We are also aware that no satisfactory solution may exist at present to discern whether historical or theological, or literary or socio-cultural considerations are *most* crucial for understanding the meaning of the NT texts themselves. Such a solution, if it exists, seems to be complicated by a number of philosophical factors which in turn shape the basic presuppositions which different NT scholars bring to their study of the NT texts in

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the first place. It is beyond the scope of our thesis to even attempt to understand these philosophies and presuppositions. At best we can only present our overall conclusions regarding the charge of reductionism which have been brought against social science methods in terms of our specific discussion of Douglas and Malina.

Rather than asking whether or not the methods of Douglas and Malina are reductionistic, we should ask whether these methods are subject to an *excessive* reductionism. Our contention is that they are not. And even if we insist on addressing the question of reductionism within the broader framework of the social science methods, we may find the remarks of Malina helpful in this regard. He explains that the accusation of reductionism may indeed be levelled at social science methods , "but only in the sense that they are sets of models that seek out the 'that', 'how' and 'why' of meanings imposed on human beings. Models, sets of tools for understanding, predicting or both, are designed with a view to limited purposes" (1983:20). Yet, for Malina, "unless used reductionistically, the social sciences do not preclude other avenues of approach to our data set" (1983:20).

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4.2.2. The question of ideological captivity and models

Our immediate concern in this section is with those critics who insist that the social science methods are but vanguards of Western bourgeois culture and late monopoly capitalism. A significant critic of social science approaches from this perspective is the South African and black theologian, Itumeleng Mosala (1989:43-66). As Mosala himself expresses the nature of his criticism:

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> The essence of my objection is not that the sociological approaches employed by biblical scholars should not have had an ideological and political agenda. On the contrary, my plea is for an open acknowledgment of the class interests that are being represented and thus an acknowledgment of at least the social limitation of the methods (1989:65).

In this statement Mosala directs a two-pronged attack on both the social-scientific criticism of the Bible. The practitioners of the social science methods do not acknowledge (i) their own *class interests* and (ii) the *social limitation* of the methods they use to study the biblical texts.

In addition to these two criticisms, Mosala also maintains that social science methods do not present a *theoretical break* with the past tradition of Western and bourgeois scholarship. Following Anthony Mansueto, Mosala states about social science methods that they

> do not present a theoretical break with the past; rather they 'amount to no more than the sociological potentialities of liberal biblical criticism along interpretive sociological or structural functionalist lines' (1989:55-56; cf.Mansueto 1983:7).

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Mosala's excursus on how NT scholarship has utilized the interpretive sociology of Max Weber (e.g.Meeks 1983; Gager 1975) and the structural functionalism of Emile Durkheim (e.g.Theissen 1978) is illuminating in its description as it is incisive in its critique (cf.Mosala 1989:56-65). When applied to the social science methods in a *general* sense, Mosala's criticisms of the ideological and political captivity of these methods and their practitioners have a great deal of merit. NT scholars who utilize social science methods and models are now increasingly aware of just how many of these models and methods have been developed "in analysis of modern European or American social phenomena"- all of them contexts reflecting the conflicts and concerns of Western

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capitalist societies (Horsley 1989:6). And so Richard Horsley, for example, recognizes the grave limitations of many social science methods and models to adequately understand ancient Jewish and Hellenistic social phenomena. Many of the social science methods and models derived from Western contexts justifiably warrant the further critique they are often "blatantly anachronistic and 'ethnocentric'" (Horsley 1989:6; cf.Malina 1983:128-129).

Again, in terms of Mosala's argument that the social science methods do not present a theoretical break with the past liberal tradition of biblical scholarship, there is sufficient evidence to support his conclusions. Practitioners of social science methods and models have been critical of some ways in which these methods and models have been used in the past. For example, NT scholars such as Elliott (1986:10-25) and Horsley (1989:15-64) have not only acknowledged the importance of Theissen's pioneering work, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity (1978)*, but they have also recognized the limitations of the basic method of structural functionalism which he employs and many of the descriptions of early Christianity which he offers. Already in the mid-1980s, Elliott expressed the concern that "recent exegetical and historical studies with a social-scientific perspective" failed "to sufficiently explicate, clarify and justify the sociological perspectives adopted and the models employed" (1986:26, n.29). As examples of this, Elliott names Theissen's pioneering work, Meek's *The First Urban Christians* in its "'eclectic,' piecemeal theory of 'moderate functionalism'" (1983:6-7), and even his own *A Home for the Homeless* in its use of conflict theory (1981:112-118). The fact that Elliott presents such a critique of NT sociological studies, including his

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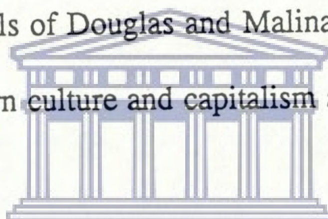
own, demonstrates the determination of many NT scholars who employ social science concepts and methods to move beyond their theoretical and ideological limitations the past. Certainly, the degree to which recent scholars of the social science methods have acknowledged the conceptual and social limitations of these methods appear to be far greater than Mosala is prepared to give credit for.

We maintain, therefore, that Mosala's criticisms of social science methods and models, as important as they may be in a general sense, are more problematic when applied to the work of scholars such as Douglas and Malina. The real question we need to ask in terms of our thesis and in light of Mosala's contentions is whether or not the social science methods and models of Douglas and Malina are open to the same charge of ideological captivity to Western culture and capitalism as are some others.



4.2.2.1. *Conflict versus symbolic models*

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Mosala himself cannot escape the fact that he too uses the insights derived from the social sciences to mount his own hermeneutical analysis of the Bible and his very critique of other practitioners of the social science method. He utilizes a historical materialist criticism of the Bible which draws widely on the theoretical resources of Marxist social analysis and literary criticism. Mosala expresses his own hermeneutical key in terms of "struggle", essentially from the perspective of "the black working class" in South Africa (1989:6). He clarifies what he means by "struggle" in terms of the attempt

> to probe the nature of the struggles behind and beneath the text; the struggles in the pages, the lines, and the vocabulary of the text; the

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> struggles that take place when readers engage the text by way of reading it; and the struggles that the completed text represents (1989:6-7).

Fundamentally, Mosala utilizes one variation of the *conflict* model which stems in a general sense from the social sciences themselves (cf.Malina 1981:20-21). The very notion of "struggle" or "contradiction" (at the class, cultural and gender levels) which undergirds his hermeneutical approach is fair evidence of this fact. In this way, Mosala's hermeneutic differs from Douglas and Malina chiefly in the *kind* of social science models which each employs in their respective approaches to the biblical texts. In contrast to Mosala, both Douglas and Malina primarily utilize forms of the *symbolic* model (cf.Malina 1981:21-23).[6] It may be helpful, therefore, to evaluate Mosala's criticism of scholars such as Douglas and Malina in terms of the different models which each proposes for the study of cultures.

Our earlier discussions of Douglas and Malina provided sufficient evidence that both scholars define a social or cultural system fundamentally in terms of a *system of symbols*. From this perspective, both scholars view meanings, values, feelings, perceptions, etc. primarily as they are embodied in and by persons, things, and events in the cultural system itself (cf.Malina 1981:21). Only from the standpoint of the primacy of socio-cultural symbols and their meanings are other aspects of any culture assessed.[7]

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[6]We are aware that Douglas may also be defined as employing a *structural functionalist* model in the tradition of Durkheim, and Malina also employs *conflict* and *structural functionalist* models in his studies of the NT writings (cf.1981:18-24).

[7]We have seen in our studies of Douglas and Malina that both are aware of how different groups or individuals in any cultural system seek some form of (temporary) social or personal equilibrium (the focus of structural functionalist models) and engender

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In contrast to both Douglas and Malina, Mosala's chief concern is with the dimensions of class struggle in any society, seen from a black and historical materialist perspective. From this basic standpoint, Mosala assesses the nature, function and meaning of cultural symbols themselves. Consequently, Mosala's general criticism applied directly to Douglas and Malina would be that they merely utilize social science methods and models (particularly symbolic models) within the tradition of liberal Western scholarship and ultimately in service to capitalist interests.

Yet, we have noted that Douglas sharply rejects many Western models of cultural anthropology. Instead, she develops her own models from the study of both small-scale (mainly) non-Western primitive cultures and industrialized Western cultures. This does not mean that Douglas does not demonstrate some biases of her own European setting. For example, "the Durkheimian legacy" has left deep imprints on Douglas' perspectives on and approaches to society (Wuthnow *et.al.* 1984:80-82). For example, her development of Durkheim's notion that 'society is God' and that religious belief and ritual are essentially reflections and maintainers of social structures lead her to some conclusions about religion and society which a historical materialist analysis might justifiably disagree with. Yet, we may also observe that Douglas comes close to appreciating the Marxist perspective. This is particularly true when she suggests that

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or are subject to various tensions or contradictions which require continual readjustments and reorganization on their part (the focus of conflict models). But both scholars appear to interpret these structural functionalist and conflict dimensions of culture with reference to the symbols of that culture.

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religion (and everything else) in society serves in large measure to legitimate the particular social order (Wuthnow *et.al.* 1984:81; cf.Isenberg 1980:47).

In light of what we have just said, we suggest that Douglas has not merely adopted the cultural anthropological methods or perspectives of Western scholarship without critical insight into and awareness of their limitations. By her own admission, she has struggled to develop her models (especially that of group-grid) with greater sensitivity to the actual and total situations of different people groups. Our descriptive analysis of her work provides sufficient examples of how sensitively she has undertaken the task of cultural analysis. We have also come to see many of the positive results she has accomplished. We have observed that Douglas often takes to heart many of the various criticisms of her work, attempting where possible to refine and develop her subsequent analyses and models in light of these criticisms. In this way, she has demonstrated that social science methods and models might indeed overcome the theoretical and social limitations of so many Western scholarly interests. These methods and models may indeed serve as important heuristic devices for the critical and creative understanding of how groups and individuals live their lives in different societies, especially those societies of the non-Western world.

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Therefore, it appears in quite sharp contrast to Mosala who often imposes a historical materialist model of analysis from the one-sided perspective of the black working class struggle on every society (and text) he studies, Douglas has attempted to develop her models from a broad-based cross-cultural analysis and from within the contexts of the groups themselves that she has studied. Methodologically, Douglas might

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be offering us a better overall analysis of how different societies *actually* operate and why they do so than does Mosala. This may be one main reason why her models have proved to be so useful in the study of the NT writings and its social world.

We now turn our attention to Malina's use of models. With due appreciation for the value of conflict models in his studies of the NT writings (cf.1981:20-24, 71-93), Malina has suggested how symbolic models may be more useful for understanding and interpreting significant aspects of the social world of Christian origins and NT theology than conflict models often allow. For example, the fact of early Christian conflict with the purity system of Palestinian Judaism is best explained from the perspective of the overall symbolic value and power which that system possessed within the 1st century Palestinian setting. In terms of conflict in contemporary society, Malina's adaption of Douglas' replication theory might prove useful for the project of the black working class struggle in South Africa. For replication theory may support a materialist analysis by helping to identify more clearly how and why particular symbols in South African society replicate throughout the structures of that society and come to shape different and conflicting human beliefs, values, perceptions and practices.

Mosala may still insist, however, that Malina's scholarly agenda is determined in large measure by that of mainstream North American, middle class readers of the NT writings. He would argue that this agenda severely limits Malina's understanding of the texts themselves.

Malina, of course, is aware that he has made the North American, middle class reader the deliberate starting point for his studies of the NT writings and its social world.

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But this does not mean that *methodologically* he has assumed the legitimacy of North American middle class interests or perspectives for the interpretation of the NT writings. Quite the contrary, Malina, like Douglas, has demonstrated a conscious effort to avoid the ethnocentrism and epistemological imperialism engendered by Western culture and Western hermeneutics. Also, Malina's use of models, especially those he adopts from Douglas, appears to break with the tradition of dominant sociological and anthropological approaches which scholars such as Horsley have identified (cf.1989:6).

This does not mean that Malina can altogether escape some measure of captivity to Western class interests, any more than Mosala can escape the bias of black working class interests in South Africa. But from within his deliberately chosen context of NT scholarship, Malina has succeeded in challenging many of the dominant class readings of the NT writings by North American readers. Furthermore, he reminds us that social science methods should not be captive to any free standing economic ideas, whether that of Adam Smith on the one hand, or Karl Marx on the other. For *both* of them are products of the modern era, and *both* of them are limited in their perspective for fully explaining the original shared meanings of groups who lived in the 1st century world of Judaism and early Christianity (1983:129-130; cf.1981:1-24).

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We may sum up our discussion on conflict and symbolic models for the study of the NT writings, especially as they pertain to Mosala, Douglas and Malina. Each type of model is useful for the study of the NT writings. None of these models (including structural functionalist models) may be excluded completely simply because certain practitioners have utilized them in rather limited or problematic ways. Douglas and

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Malina have demonstrated how significant and fruitful symbolic models may be for the study of primitive societies such as those of the 1st century Mediterranean world.

Mosala's overall criticisms of the social science methods, therefore, do not seem to be as valid for Douglas and Malina as they may be for some other scholars who use these methods. In fact, Douglas and Malina reflect a greater sensitivity towards the ethnocentrism and epistemological imperialism of Western scholarship than Mosala demonstrates towards the ideological and political limitations of scholarship which employs a historical materialist analysis of the Bible.

4.2.2.2. *Concluding summary*

We conclude our discussion regarding the "ideological captivity" of social science methods and models for the study of the NT by accepting Mosala's criticisms as important cautionary considerations. His accusation that social science approaches are still largely tied to Western bourgeois interests and Western discourse and practice must remain a constant challenge to even the more critically sensitive scholarship of Douglas and Malina.

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But Mosala's criticisms are themselves the products of 'ideological captivity', in this case, to the ideas and methods supplied by historical materialism and the black working-class struggle. Consequently, he has not been as readily appreciative of the critical and 'scientific' dimensions of social science approaches to the Bible, especially in recent years. Furthermore, Mosala appears to have confused criticism of the *use* of particular social science methods and models with the actual and potential explanatory

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value of these methods and models themselves. Therefore, it is not surprising that his rejection of the former has automatically led to the rejection of the latter. However, our study of the methods and models of Douglas and Malina have strongly suggested both the explanatory *value* and *utility* of these methods and models.

We must observe with caution, however, that the differences between Mosala on the one hand, and Douglas and Malina on the other are rooted in more than merely their different class interests. Class interests do affect the different perspectives of each scholar to a lesser or greater degree. More deeply distinctive of each scholar appears to be their respective philosophical presuppositions which in turn lead them to different conclusions. This means that here, as was the case with our discussion of the question of reductionism earlier, we are unable to address all the complex ramifications which set the above scholars apart from one another. What we have attempted to provide, however, is some critical framework within which to conduct further discussion on the precise contribution of social science methods and models to the study of the NT writings and their social world.

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4.2.3. The question of methodological 'advance' or 'paradigm shift'

Such critics of sociological approaches to the NT as Christopher Tuckett have argued that while these approaches certainly produce many new and useful insights into the NT writings, "at the level of *method*" these approaches "are not so new after all" (1987:147). Tuckett maintains that "there is little here which differs fundamentally from

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the traditional approaches to the text associated with the historical-critical method" (Tuckett 1987:148).

There is much in our earlier discussions to confirm Tuckett's general perspective not only of sociological, but also of anthropological approaches to the NT. Our survey in Part 1 suggested that social science methods are linked to and really flow out of the earlier historical-critical and theological schools of biblical interpretation. More specifically, our exploratory study of the cultural hermeneutic of Bruce Malina in Part 3 has confirmed that he is clearly indebted to the insights of historical, theological and literary methods.

But practitioners of the social science methods have insisted that they also bring something distinctively *new* in orientation and method to the field of NT interpretation. Rather than the principal and more typical focus of earlier methods on a history or theology of ideas embodied in the NT texts, various practitioners of the social science method emphasize the *social* and *cultural* settings, structures and processes which give rise to these ideas. These socio-cultural settings are shown to be indispensable for understanding the meaning of historical and theological ideas. Recent practitioners of the social science approach to of the study of the NT, especially those such as Malina, also demonstrate a deliberate, critical and creative use of conceptual models (derived mainly from sociology and anthropology) to a degree that certainly surpasses that of practitioners of the other methods. In this sense, they may be seen as having introduced some 'new method' for NT studies.

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Yet, it is not our intention to persist in a debate with Tuckett regarding whether or not sociological and anthropological approaches are, in some *general* sense, expressions of some new method for NT interpretation. Instead, we shall assess whether or not the cultural hermeneutic of Bruce Malina and his use of some models from Mary Douglas represent something of an *advance* or even a *methodological shift* in the study of the NT writings. Our aim here is not to discover any definitive answer to this question. Rather we merely begin the process of evaluating the hermeneutical method of Malina in terms of the language of 'advance' and 'paradigm shift' in NT studies. Before we proceed, it is necessary to understand what we mean by each of these notions.

4.2.3.1. *Matters of definition*

Of the two notions of 'advance' and 'paradigm shift', the first is the easier to understand. Therefore our comments in this regard need only be brief.

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For any new orientation or method to be considered an 'advance' on previous methods, it would not need to break with these previous methods in any fundamental sense. Rather the new orientation or method would merely have to demonstrate that it clearly deepens and/or broadens the critical and interpretative capacity of any earlier method. For example, form criticism represented something of an 'advance' in historical approaches to the NT texts. In particular, it went beyond the mere focus on the general aspects of NT texts in the form which we presently read them today to the study of the forms in which the various traditions of Jesus of Nazareth may have been originally formed and passed down to us (cf.Neill 1964:236-291). Though not unproblematic or

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easy to apply, form criticism remains "a perfectly legitimate exercise of the critical art" (Neill 1964:247). The important point we wish to emphasize here is that in spite of some legitimate 'advances' which form criticism introduced into NT studies, it still retained a basic rootedness within the scholarly agenda of the historical-critical method. As such, in spite of its own distinctive features, form criticism still found a theoretical and methodological connection with other historical-critical approaches such as tradition history and redaction criticism.

We move now to an understanding of 'paradigms' and 'paradigm shifts'. Scholars who have used the language of 'paradigms' to understand the development and shifts that have taken place in theology (Küng 1988:123-169) and missiology (Bosch 1990:181-189) through time have also noted the general confusion, ambiguity and even controversy surrounding the meaning of the term. Both Hans Küng and David Bosch who are indebted to the studies of paradigm changes in the natural sciences by physicist and historian of science, T.S. Kuhn (1970), have noted how he has been charged with using 'paradigm' in at least twenty-six different ways. Only in his postscript does Kuhn more helpfully define 'paradigm' as "the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by members of a given community" (1970:175). For Hans Küng, 'paradigms' are fundamentally understood as "models of interpretation, explanation, or *understanding*" (1988:132; cf.Bosch 1990:185). More explicitly, a model or paradigm stresses

> the provisory character of the pattern, which holds true only under specific presuppositions and within specific limits, which does not on principle exclude other patterns, but *always has an only relatively objective grasp of reality, from a certain perspective, with certain variables* (1988:134).

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Critics of paradigm theory may suppose that it "fosters relativism, that there are really no ultimate norms or values" (Bosch 1990:186). But it is better to recognize that no research position, whether in the natural and social sciences, or in theology, missiology and biblical studies, can ever be defined (without qualification) in the mutually exclusive categories of "absolute" and "relative", or "objective" and "subjective". Rather, "a creative tension" or dialectical relationship always exists between the two in any human endeavor to interpret particular dimensions of reality (cf.Bosch 1990:186-187).

We may sum up the first two main features about any 'paradigm shift' in a particular discipline which we have identified so far: (i) it is always rooted in the broader historical tradition of the discipline, and (ii) it reflects the new, if relative perspective which members have in common in their approach to the discipline at any point in time. But two remaining questions require some attention. Why does a 'paradigm shift' in any discipline occur in the first place? And how are we to understand the way in which the notion of 'paradigm shift' in any discipline differs from that of 'advance' described above?

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In response to the first question, we follow Kuhn who states that a 'paradigm shift' in scientific theory may be seen (usually, although not exclusively) as a particular response to a crisis which the discipline experiences in a particular historical period (1970:66-91). Often, however, a new paradigm emerges "at least in embryo, before a crisis has developed far or been explicitly recognized" (Kuhn 1970:86). In science the

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result has been, for example, the different 'paradigms' of Copernicus, Newton, Lavoisier, and Einstein. In a similar fashion to that of the natural sciences, 'paradigm shifts' in the respective fields of theology and missiology have generally emerged in response to crises in these disciplines (cf.Küng 1987:123-127; Bosch 1990:188-189). In this way Küng is able to identify six major paradigms which reflect how theology has developed in history (1988:128).[8] Bosch follows Küng by identifying six main 'paradigms' in the field of missiology (1990:182-183,187-189).

In terms of the second question as to what may constitute a difference between an 'advance' and a 'paradigm shift' in a discipline, we refer to our critical survey of biblical methods in Part 1 of our thesis. It is possible to see that the neo-orthodox or theological method of Karl Barth presented some 'advance' in the earlier historical approaches to the Bible. For example, in both his editions of *Der Romerbrief* (1918, 1921), Barth accepted many positive features of the historical-critical method. Yet he deepened its capacity to handle the historical dimensions of the biblical texts by suggesting an alternative perspective on the meaning of biblical history and the nature of revelation revealed in the NT texts themselves. In this way, he challenged historical-critical methods to view the Bible more seriously and differently as not only the words of human beings, but also as

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[8]These are (i) the apocalyptic paradigm of primitive Christianity, (ii) the Hellenistic paradigm of the patristic period, (iii) the medieval Roman Catholic paradigm, (iv) the Protestant Reformation paradigm, (v) the modern Enlightenment paradigm, and (vi) the contemporary and emerging Ecumenical paradigm (in which Küng includes dialectical, existential, hermeneutical, political, liberation, feminist, black and Third World theologies).

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the words of God, to be interpreted on its own terms without the prejudiced perspectives of the modern historian.

But already in *Der Romerbrief*, and more specifically in his later *Church Dogmatics*, Barth presented a fundamental *epistemological break* with the whole historical-critical school of interpretation which was still typical of mainline liberal theology and biblical interpretation well into the 20th century. In sharp contrast to the concern of historical methods to 'get behind' the biblical texts in order to discover their meaning, Barth stressed that his primary concern in Church Dogmatics was to listen to what Scripture was saying and to tell others what he heard (in Ford 1979:55). In short, then, the comment of Herzog on the theological method mentioned in Part 1 is an appropriate one to repeat here. *"He [Barth] deepened the historical-critical method and supplemented it with a concern for the wholeness encompassing text and subject matter"* (1956:321).

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It is beyond the scope of our thesis to evaluate the various 'paradigm shifts' which both Küng and Bosch have identified in their respective disciplines. Also, we do not explore the precise nature of the 'paradigm shift' that Barth's theological method introduced into the study of the Bible. We do accept in a very general sense that there may be some unavoidable connections between the 'paradigms' in the fields of theology and missiology on the one hand, and those in biblical interpretation on the other.which have occurred in theology and missiology. Yet, in light of our critical survey in Part 1 and the variety of developments within the field of biblical interpretation in recent decades, we suggest that the 'paradigms' of Küng and Bosch may be too general to

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accommodate the subtle shifts which have occurred and which still continue to appear in biblical studies.

In short, then, it is not our intention to propose our own list of 'paradigms' in biblical interpretation, since this task will also take us outside the sphere of our concern in this section. Rather, we shall attempt to evaluate the cultural hermeneutical method of Bruce Malina in terms of our earlier definitions of 'advance' and 'paradigm shifts'.

4.2.3.2. *Malina's method and the language of 'advance' and 'paradigm shift'*

We have repeated on a number of occasions in our preceding discussion of Malina's cultural hermeneutic that it remains in continuity with earlier methods of NT interpretation, especially as these methods have developed in the West. Yet, in his attempt to 'get behind' the NT texts or 'into' the social world of these texts, Malina's method follows the tradition of historical criticism more closely than it does the other methods. Our first consideration will be, therefore, to evaluate whether or not Malina's method represents an 'advance' in the historical-critical approach to the NT texts? Only then will we provide some critical comment about his cultural method in terms of the language of 'paradigm shift'.

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Malina's primary concern has been to address a fundamental problem or crisis in the reading and interpretation of the NT texts among (mainly) mainstream North Americans. He has suggested that mainstream North American readings and interpretations of the NT texts have been prone to ethnocentrism, inaccuracy, superficiality, dullness etc. A dominant reason for this is that North American readers

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have failed or been unable to appreciate how the NT is *both* (i) a 'foreign' text, and as such cannot be understood by recourse to the dominant cultural scripts of Western society, *and* (ii) a text of the Christian faith which communicates with the contemporary reader in faith challenging ways. In this regard, Malina has identified the central hermeneutical problem which all critical biblical scholars define in terms of the *continuity* and *distance* which exists between the NT texts and its social world on the one hand, and the modern readers of these texts and their social world on the other.

But Malina's proposed solution to this problem appears to take us beyond the methods of many contemporary Western approaches to the NT texts. He has clearly wrestled with the NT texts themselves, but he has argued that the understanding of their meaning is inseparably connected to the *social* or *symbolic* systems of the 1st century Mediterranean world in which they were originally conceived and proclaimed (1986:v,1). In other words, Malina has insisted that in order for North American readers to more accurately understand the NT texts "on their own terms", they have to find some way of moving from the NT text to the social or symbolic system that gave it meaning (cf.Malina 1986:5). Our analysis of Malina's use of cultural models (notably those of Mary Douglas) demonstrates how his method takes us to the heart of a number of usually unaddressed questions in NT interpretation in the West. We mention only three of these here.

Firstly, Malina has not merely focussed on a history or theology of ideas in the NT texts, but he has enabled us to understand *how* and *why* these ideas may have emerged in the first place. Although Malina may not be the first or only one to make this

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claim, his methodology does suggest a new way of answering these questions. He has shown how an understanding of *socio-cultural* structures, forces and processes are indispensable for understanding the beliefs and practices expressed in the NT texts. The significance of this is that ethnocentric readings of the NT texts are now more difficult for Western readers because they are compelled to take seriously the social world and the symbolic systems of the NT texts themselves.

Secondly, Malina has demonstrated how very different societies such as those of the 1st century Mediterranean world and the 20th century North American world are able to be compared by utilizing the four dimensions of Douglas' group-grid model as well as his additional four types of social catchment areas.[9] Again, Malina's method retains the deep sense of distance between the social worlds of the NT texts and the modern readers of these texts, but not without providing a way of opening up and discovering as accurately as possible the original meaning of the NT texts themselves. *Thirdly*, Malina's use of cultural models has built into it a self-critical dimension which necessitates the constant testing not only of the models used to study the NT texts, but also of any interpretation of the NT texts and their social world which may be proposed. In this

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[9]Malina responds directly to people who find it problematic that eight social types are able to provide a model of comparison for vastly different cultures, spanning hundreds or even thousands of years. He replies: "It might be of interest to those with such objections to consider Thom's (1969) mathematical demonstration for the existence of only eight shapes in four dimensions. If human beings can perceive only eight shapes in their limited four dimensional perspective, then, as Thom himself suggests, perhaps there can only be eight ultimate social structures within the human experience of humankind" (1985:18, n.2; cf.1986:64; Thompson 1979).

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way, NT studies have been provided with a more critical, yet creative method of interpretation.

What Malina's cultural anthropological approach to the NT suggests, therefore, is a definite *advance* in the area of NT interpretation in the West, especially in the broader interpretative tradition of the historical school. While Malina is clearly located in the broad stream of social science approaches to the biblical texts, his specific cultural hermeneutic and use of models have the potential for developing and deepening both the critical and creative dimensions of these approaches as well as other approaches to the Bible.

And yet we must add, more cautiously, that it may still be too early to state whether or not Malina's method and others like it present any definitive breakthrough or *paradigm shift* in NT interpretation itself. It appears that Malina's method, in spite of its critical and creative qualities, still remains strongly attached to the historical-critical school of interpretation. Certainly, his method has overcome many of the limitations and insufficiencies of the historical method. But he does not seem to have demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that the method and questions he has brought to bear on the NT texts are unanswerable by some form of the historical method itself. Many scholars who remain committed to the historical method have found many aspects of Malina's method acceptable and even functional within their own approaches to the NT texts. The responses from these scholars have not been as negative or opposed to the cultural method of Malina and others within the emerging tradition of social- scientific criticism as they have often been, for example, to many new literary critical methods. Yet, this may not

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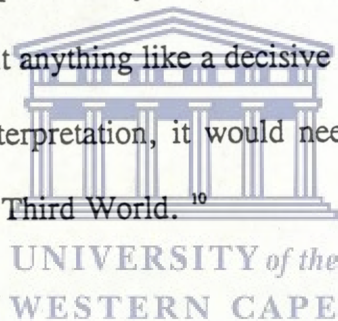
mean that the new literary critical methods demonstrate a definite 'paradigm shift' from the more dominant historical-critical methods, nor that certain streams of the social science method do not represent a similar 'shift'. In short, we suggest that it may be still too early to assess whether or not either the social science method of scholars such as Malina or the new literary critical methods of other scholars represent something equivalent to a 'paradigm shift' in NT interpretation. Presently, there are only faint signs that appear to suggest that Malina's cultural anthropological method and other anthropological and sociological methods are heralding some form of 'methodological shift' in Western hermeneutics, particularly in North America. But, it is also hoped that for Malina's method to represent anything like a decisive 'paradigm shift' (perhaps even a genuine 'advance') in NT interpretation, it would need to be tested in a variety of cultures, including those of the Third World.[10]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4.2.3.3. *Concluding summary*

Particularly in the sphere of Western (mainly North American) hermeneutics, the cultural method of Malina suggests a definite 'advance' in the historical-critical interpretation of the NT writings, Christian origins and NT theology. Malina's method

[10]We are unable to assess the degree to which this may or may not already be happening elsewhere in the world. In South Africa, there are increasing, if still faint signs that social science methods are becoming more and more formative for NT studies. We refer specifically to such institutions as the Department of Theological Studies at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg, and the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Cape Town in Cape Town. At both these institutions scholars are currently using different forms of the social science method to understand and explain particular aspects of the biblical writings.

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and those like it not only take us beyond the critical concerns of other historical methods so dominant in the West, but also provide good examples of how other methods themselves can be even more critical and creative in their interpretation of the NT texts.

Yet it may be too early to judge whether or not the social science methods of Malina and others represent anything like a 'paradigm shift' in NT studies. For one thing, any discussion of 'paradigm shifts' in NT interpretation has to take seriously the difficulties associated with the precise definition of particular concepts within paradigm theory itself, especially as this theory is applied to biblical interpretation in general. What exactly would constitute a 'paradigm shift' in NT interpretation, therefore, still awaits further critical analysis.

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FINAL CONCLUSION

Our primary aim in this thesis has been to explore the questions which surround the explanatory value and utility of social science methods for the study of the NT writings within the context of their social world. In order to give greater focus and depth to our exploratory study, we attempted a more detailed exposition of one tradition of the social sciences, viz., cultural anthropology.

In particular, we described in considerable detail two important theoretical features which arise from the fieldwork and research of a leading British social (cultural) anthropologist, Mary Douglas. The first theoretical feature of Douglas which we described was her understanding of 'purity and pollution' systems and their function in different societies. The second theoretical feature was her model of 'group and grid' for the purpose of cross-cultural analysis. Both these theoretical features of Douglas' cultural anthropology have become valuable heuristic devices for the study of the NT writings within the context of their social world. One clear evidence of just how significant Douglas' work has proven to be is the NT scholarship of Bruce Malina.

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Malina has been vitally concerned to address a central hermeneutical problem which confronts contemporary, mainly mainstream North American readers of the NT texts. This problem may be expressed in terms of the cultural continuity and distance which exists between the ancient NT texts and their world on the one hand, and the modern readers of these texts and their world on the other. In order to address this hermeneutical problem, Malina has freely chosen to use, adapt and even refine Douglas'

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anthropological insights, in particular her models of 'purity and pollution', and 'group and grid'. In the process, he seems to have demonstrated the explanatory value and utility of Douglas' cultural models for NT studies. He has shown that these models help us to understand and explain particular dimensions of Christian origins and NT theology, otherwise neglected or ignored by many other interpretative methods.

We may remind ourselves of only three specific examples of Malina's positive appropriation of Douglas' cultural models in relation to NT studies. *Firstly*, Malina has shown that the Jewish purity system of 1st century Mediterranean world is an important context, among others, for explaining why Jesus and early Christians such as Paul reflected different attitudes and actions from those which were more typical of established Judaism.

Secondly, Malina's use of Douglas' group-grid model, and his addition of the model defining social catchment areas have provided helpful ways for explaining the different and complex social world in which the NT writings were originally conceived and proclaimed.

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Thirdly, Malina's exploration of the meaning of fasting in specific NT texts makes possible a deeper understanding and explanation of *why* Jesus and the early Pauline tradition of Christians refused to fast as did others in their society.

In the above three ways (and in other ways reflected in Part 3 of this thesis), Malina's cultural hermeneutic seems to demonstrate its strong potential for providing a more critical and creative interpretation of a variety of issues which relate specifically to Christian origins and NT theology.

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In Part 4 of our thesis we asked whether or not the cultural anthropological approaches of Douglas and Malina were either reductionistic, and /or ideologically captive to the ideas and values of Western culture and scholarship. We concluded that neither Douglas' nor Malina's approach are completely free from either one of these charges. However, we have argued that both these scholars exude an explicit self-critical dimension in their studies. This helps them to overcome any excessive form of either reductionism or ideological captivity which may otherwise be inherent to their interpretative traditions.

One final question considered in Part 4 was whether or not the cultural hermeneutic of Malina represented either an 'advance' or a 'paradigm shift' in NT interpretation. We suggested that any definitive answer to this question may be immature at this stage in light of the relative 'newness' of the social science approaches to the NT writings. Our tentative perspective on the matter, however, is that Malina's cultural hermeneutic, while it does not appear to represent a 'paradigm shift' in NT studies, does demonstrate something of a a definite 'advance' on the earlier historical-critical approach to the NT writings. This seems to be true, especially within the tradition of Western scholarship. His method helps to deepen the concerns of an historical approach to the NT texts by highlighting the importance of the *socio-cultural* dimensions of these texts. In the process, he demonstrates how these socio-cultural dimensions, often neglected or ignored by other historical methods, are indispensable both for understanding the nature of Christian origins and explaining the meaning of particular aspects of NT theology. Furthermore, Malina's cultural anthropological approach makes possible a less

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ethnocentric reading of the NT writings than is generally the case with many other Western readings of these texts.

We conclude that social science methods, especially as they find expression in the works of Mary Douglas and Bruce Malina respectively, are highly suggestive for the task of NT interpretation. They not only embody the potential of social science methods in terms of their explanatory value and utility, but also contribute much to recovering "the sheer delight of reading and using the [NT] as it is" (cf.Malina 1983:119). Yet, it is hoped that if the social science methods of scholars such as Malina are to represent anything like a genuine 'advance' or a definite 'paradigm shift' in NT interpretation, then they must become increasingly accessible to and be applicable in other contexts of NT studies, especially those of the Third World. While there appear to be faint signs that this may already be happening, social science methods (as they are developing in Western approaches to the NT) remain generally a very young and largely untested tradition of interpretation in the Third World.

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ABBREVIATIONS

General

B.C.E.	Before the Common Era
Col.	Colossians
Cor.	Corinthians
Deut.	Deuteronomy
Eph.	Ephesians
Ex.	Exodus
Ezek.	Ezekiel
Gal.	Galatians
GSM	General Symbolic Media
Jn.	John
Lk.	Luke
Macc.	Books of the Maccabees
Mk.	Mark
Mt.	Matthew
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
Rom.	Romans
Thess.	Thessalonians

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Journals

ABQ	American Baptist Quarterly
BTB	Biblical Theological Bulletin
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
RSR	Religious Studies Review
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SJT	Scottish Journal of Theology
TS	Theological Studies

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