

## 5. Advocacy Criticism

*Social history and biblical interpretation; liberation theology; cultural criticism; feminist and LGBTQ+ hermeneutics.*

### Social History

- (as opposed to Social-Scientific Theory, next slide)
- **Illuminate texts through understanding the social worlds in which they emerged**
- **Loyalties and definition: family, ethnicity, gender, occupation**
  - Ex.: The striking contrasts of Jesus' concept of the family of believers as opposed to birth families (see Mark 3:31-35)
  - conversions of whole households
- Combination of governmental and religious roles
- **Concepts of ritual purity**
- **Patronage**
- **Economic disparities**
  - what "class" did Jesus and some of his main disciples come from?

## Social-Scientific *Theories*

- **Apply current models of analysis to texts from the ancient world**
- **Institutionalization of religious groups**
  - Max Weber’s “the routinization of charisma”
- **Socio-economic divisions**
- post-colonialism
- **Cautions from our evangelical author-friends**
  - do not rule out role of God or human freedom
  - be cautious about assuming unreliability of the Bible
  - is a given theory commonly accepted by even other social scientists?
  - are parallels with biblical material close enough to justify application?

## Liberation Theology

- **Started as Roman Catholic response to poverty and oppression in Latin America**
- The “Majority World”
- **Experience of poverty**
  - Action takes precedence over rhetoric
  - focus on the biblical narratives of oppression (Exodus in OT, kingdom and James in NT)
- **“The Poor” are not just economically disadvantaged—all need to turn to God as their only hope**
- Civil disobedience of Hebrew midwives and Esther!
- ***Listen to the voice of the disenfranchised, test each claim against scripture, examine presuppositions***

## Cultural Criticism

- **Emphasis on reading scripture through the eyes of marginalized cultures**
  - The danger of selectively accepting portions of scripture and rejecting “dehumanizing” passages (rather than trying to reconcile or interpret)
- **Postcolonialism, especially in Africa and Asia**
  - Even after political liberation, Western economic and religious dominance continues
  - Tends to accept religious pluralism, “many roads’
  - Resistance to “white Jesus”
- **Larry Hurtado’s caution: beware of cultural “fashions”**
- **Some non-Western cultures better parallel the biblical world**
  - African understanding of polygamy (social status, economic advantages, cementing alliances)
  - African-American acceptance of literary unity of books (such as Daniel 1–6, 7–12)
  - Spanish readers have one word, *justicia*, for the Greek *dikaisounē* (rather than “righteousness” and “justice”)

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## Feminist Hermeneutics

- Review Klein et al., IBI, 134–164 for lecture 6
- Quick introduction
  - Three directions in 1980’s
    - **Liberal** (political reform, equal civil rights, improved living and working conditions)
    - **Socialist/Marxist** (capitalism in patriarchal cultures placed double burdens on women)
    - **Romantic/Radical** (feminist values inherently *superior*)
- When reviewing this material and doing the additional reading for next class, look for divisions such as:
  - **Evangelical (biblical?)** and **traditional Christian feminism**
  - **Revisionist or neo-orthodox**
  - **Remnant** (Phyllis Trible)
  - **Reconstructive or “Liberationist”** (Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza)
  - **Complementarian** vs. **Egalitarian**

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## LGBTQ+ Hermeneutics

- **Interpretative approaches**
  - those who accept biblical strictures on behavior
  - those who reject strictures as culture specific and outdated
  - those who propose strictures were meant for “extreme” cases of homosexual rape, pederasty, ritual prostitution, or promiscuity
- **“Queer” theology**
  - subsumes all sexual minorities under one label
  - applied to any “strange” (original usage: different than heteronormative) feature of human behavior in scripture
  - sin becomes a rejection of radical love
- **Discovering or recovering lost possibilities or retrojective eisegesis?**

## Webb and Cultural Analysis

- “Everything within Scripture is cultural in the sense that the Bible represents God’s commandments to human society through cultural forms” (Webb, 245)
- All communication takes on a cultural dimension, so culture is part of the hermeneutical process
- Distinguish between what is “culturally confined” and “transcultural”
  - What aspects of the text should we discontinue or modify and which should we continue to practice
- Still, as a believer, Scripture is the ultimate authority for Webb
  - Culture raises, it does not resolve, issues for him

## Webb's "Redemptive Movement" Hermeneutic

- **Christians must challenge culture when it departs from "kingdom values" but identify with the progress of their culture in other areas**
  - departures: pornography, murder, theft, rape
  - positive progress: care of elderly, compassionate health care and helping the poor, concern for environment, social justice, gender parity
  - cultural components vs. transcultural components
- **The example of slavery**
  - OT never commanded it and Mosaic legislation was more humane than surrounding cultures
  - NT does not formally abolish it but plants the seeds for abolition by positing the equality of all persons (and Paul seems to suggest it)

## Webb's Model and Women's Issues

- **Standard approaches**
  - Strong Patriarchy
  - Soft Patriarchy/Hierarchy
    - complementarianism?
  - Evangelical Egalitarianism (where Bible allows)
  - Mainstream Egalitarianism
  - Secular Egalitarianism
- **Seems to be moving to evangelical egalitarian complementarianism**
  - *Huntsman's example of Pauline and Petrine Household Codes and "moving the ball down the field"*

## Sidenote: Webb on Homosexual Behavior

- Three possible positions
  - Marital Heterosexuality only
  - Advance to a Covenant, Equal Partner model
  - Casual, open behavior
- Webb comes down for compassion and greater tolerance but still against homosexual activity
  - Israelite law and NT injunctions were *stricter* than surrounding cultures
  - No clear models for approved relationships
  - Greater understanding of **non-volitional factors**—such as biological and environmental influences—may encourage a sliding scale of culpability
  - Believers remain convicted by **heterosexual hypocrisy** (epidemic adultery, pornography, and sexual violence)