

these reasons, the relation between feminism and feminist scholarship, on one side, and Christian theology and the existing ecclesiastical-congregational practice, on the other, cannot be an uncritical-affirmative one. Which hermeneutical principles are then determinative for Christian women exegetes?

## Chapter Two

### Feminist Exegetical Hermeneutics

According to its self-understanding, feminist exegesis of the Christian Bible of the First and New Testaments situates itself where exegesis and feminism intersect. *Biblical exegesis* here means the historical and literary, scholarly interpretation of the Bible within the overall framework of Christian theology. Authenticated in scholarly responsibility and related to the experiences of "the people of God," it means the account that Christian theology on its part gives about that faith of which the Bible is seen to be the witness to the (self-)revelation of God. "Feminism" here refers to the determined movement in recent times of women seeking to come free from the judicial and economic predominance of "fathers" and also from the psychic and ideological tutelage of men. (See 2.2.1.) Dorothee Sölle puts it as follows: "Feminism is women's breaking away from tutelage—whether imposed by others or self-inflicted." This depiction of feminism as a "movement" must be placed alongside the understanding of feminist scholarship as a scholarly occupation by women that does not lose sight of the (ethical-pragmatic) goal of every woman becoming a subject. Because of this understanding, feminist scholarship does its work in a "biased" state when it seeks to uncover unexamined sexual dualisms and stereotypes of femininity in all scholarly disciplines of the *universitas scientiarum* and to develop approaches that are of a different nature and do justice to women.

Christian theology has been hitherto de facto reserved for men and the office of priest is de jure reserved in the Roman Catholic church to the (unmarried) male. Finally, the philosophical-theological explication of God-talk is caught in diverse, unenlightened clichés of masculinity and femininity which thwart women's coming and being of age. For

### 2.1 Types of Theologically Informed Approaches of Women to Scripture and Its Hermeneutics

In 1985, Carolyn Osiek, an American feminist exegete and member of a Roman Catholic religious community, proposed a typification of feminist study of the Bible. It is oriented by how women responded to the realization that in the history of Christianity, the Bible was a primary instrument in the establishment and consolidation of the patriarchal exercise of power. She gives *feminism* a broadly encompassing meaning to include consciously every effort toward the dignity and advancement of woman in every domain of society. In what follows, and in accordance with her suggestion, we will discuss the German-language feminist literature with a view to its theological-hermeneutical options. Relying on selected examples, the typification attempted here will make use of the differentiation or the characterization of feminist theological positions. This is done in terms of different levels of reference that go beyond those of Osiek and are in line with those of Hedwig Meyer-Wilmes, a feminist theologian teaching at Nijmegen and Louvain Universities.

Hedwig Meyer-Wilmes, *Rebellion auf der Grenze* (Freiburg, Basel, and Vienna: Herder Verlag, 1990), pt. 2; Carolyn Osiek, "The Feminist and the Bible: Hermeneutical Alternatives," in Adela Yarbro Collins, ed., *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, SBL Cent. Publ. 10 (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985), 93–105; Marie-Theres Wacker, "Gefährliche Erinnerungen: Feministische Blicke auf die hebräische Bibel," in Marie-Theres Wacker, ed., *Theologie-feministisch* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1988), 14–58.

#### 2.1.1 The Hermeneutics of Loyalty

The first type, which Osiek calls "the hermeneutics of loyalty," sees the problem of biblically legitimated discrimination against women not in

approach, what is rejected is not a possibly defective interpretation here and there but traditional Christian interpretation as a whole, together with the document to be interpreted. In this perspective, the Bible can have no authority for women anymore, because the history of what the Bible has led to has to be seen throughout as a history of patriarchy. This is because the revelation of God, asserted by and in the Bible, has—precisely on account of that patriarchy—finally disqualified itself as irretrievably sexist. The required withdrawal from the tradition of biblical faith as a whole, which is concomitant with such a conviction, is undertaken with recourse to different religious-theological positions. Elizabeth Cady Stanton (see 1.1) did so on the basis of a deistic principle of reason beyond the antagonisms of gender. This provided motivation and foundation for politically enlightened activity. Mary Daly went on her way after “bidding God—the Father farewell” in the name of a speculatively and existentially grasped primordial ground of all being called “God/ess.” Finally, Heide Göttner-Abendroth proposed to withdraw in the name of the Goddess, the cosmic Great Feminine, whose efficaciousness is experienced in ritual and liturgies and requires no mediation anymore by a sacred scripture.

The strength of this hermeneutic is that it relentlessly confronts with its factual particularity the biblical-Christian tradition's claim to universality and thereby forces it into reconsideration. However, the alternatives cited are in their own way not themselves free of dilemma. Mary Daly's vision of a gynocentric counterworld at the edges of the world-embracing patriarchy remains dependent ideologically and economically on the dominant structures. Elizabeth Cady Stanton's optimism of reason lies on the other side of this century's two world wars and the terrors of fascism and Stalinism. In their shadow, one may speak in the best-case scenarios of “the dialectics of the Enlightenment,” if one does not already have to speak of “deadly progress.” Recourse to Heide Göttner-Abendroth's cosmic-divine (see 2.1.4) offers a counterconcept, namely, that of a spirituality which is critical of reason and puts greater weight on nature, sensuousness, and femaleness. She claims that this will do away with the patriarchal myth which burdens woman with the fall in the Garden of Eden. Yet her counterconcept and its basic *theologoumenon* of the fusion of the feminine-divine and the world cannot do without a Fall—of the male—while also tending to be far too uncritical of human thinking and doing.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible* (see 1.1); Mary Daly, *Gyn-ecology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979); Heide Göttner-Abendroth, *Die*

the Bible itself but solely in its interpretation. It sees how the Bible, albeit in a form bound and “accommodated” to the people of its time, tells of the order of creation and redemption that God willed. In this order a place is assigned to men and women that is specific to them but not of a different qualitative level. Passages in Scripture that appear to be objectionable to women today are either only seemingly problematic in appearance, since their depth has not been grasped, or are strictly limited in their application. In terms of German material, reference is to be made once again to Michael Faulhaber's work *Charakterbilder der biblischen Frauenwelt* (see 1.3.1), which sought to support and empower Catholic women teachers in their calling to educate young women. It may be called a “feminist” work in the wider sense of Osiek's definition. In keeping with the traditional treatment of the Old Testament, Faulhaber refers to the limited and preliminary nature of the possibilities available to the guiding “hand of God” in the moral code of Israel, particularly in relation to the protection of “the honor of women.” In contrast, Jesus manifests himself as God's son who overcomes these limitations, liberating women for their true service. The injunction of Paul against women teaching is restricted to specific women—and to them only—whose unauthorized arrogation to themselves of an official teaching activity in the church, related to one of its offices, “had made the ruling necessary” (230).

The strength of this hermeneutic is its attention to the whole Bible; its chief problem is the supranaturalistic conception of Jesus Christ's activity and that of the apostles. In these conceptions the unchanging, divine ordinances for church and world are made manifest and soon thereafter faithfully recorded in Scripture. Within such a view, there are only two possible reactions to the discrimination of women: either one explains it away, or one sees it as an accidental departure from a good and timelessly valid order. What seems not possible is a consistent feminist analysis of patriarchy. This would pay heed to the human, or, more accurately, the male mediation of both the revelations testified to in Scripture and of the official institutional agencies which interpret them. For that very reason, it is not appropriate to designate this hermeneutic “feminist.” Even though in its point of departure it is biblical, it is paternalistic.

## 2.1.2 The Hermeneutic of Rejection

Another type of approach to the Bible, the polar opposite of the one just discussed, is characterized by a decisive “hermeneutic of rejection.” In this

*Göttin und ihr Heros: Die matriarchalen Religionen in Mythos, Märchen und Dichtung* (Munich: Verlag Frauenoffensive, 1980); idem, *Die tanzende Göttin: Prinzipien einer matriarchalen Aesthetik* (Munich: Verlag Frauenoffensive, 1982; enlarged ed., 1984), Eng. trans.: *The Dancing Goddess: Principles of a Matriarchal Aesthetic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991).

### 2.1.3 The Hermeneutic of Revision

Since it follows a critical-historical approach, "revisionistic" hermeneutics takes note throughout of the historically conditioned refractions of God's Word in the human word, including in the New Testament, and does so more clearly than the hermeneutic of loyalty. It sees the existing patriarchal form of the Bible as a *husk* (the human word) that is distinguishable from the nonpatriarchal *kernel* (the divine word) of the biblical revelation. In order to demonstrate the legitimacy of this distinction and, if need be, combine it with a call for the required change in traditional habits of interpretation and in the praxis of the church, it has to be shown also that the biblical world is not utterly determined by patriarchy. The feminist exegetical approach now described achieves this, first by historical research and, in particular, by "gender research" (see 2.2.3) that brings to light the diverse reality of women in biblical times. It demonstrates that women did have space for freedom of action and self-determination and possessed, within a context undeniably patriarchal, status and dignity. In other words, in the midst of the androcentrism of life's order that ruled women's reality, it was an androcentrism that was not a priori and utterly sexist-misogynist. The second way this approach makes its point is in developing literary-feminist modes of reading the biblical text. Not least, it probes the text's God-language for "structures of the feminine." This not only methodically leads into a new perspective of reception but also seeks to imbue textual content that is affirming of women with theological significance (as a "word of Scripture").

The publications of Methodist exegete Phyllis Trible are an example of this approach; it is she who coined the phrase "the nonpatriarchal principle" of the Bible (see 3.2.3). In her work, this principle remains more or less formal, while other feminist women provide it with material content. Letty Russell, for example, recalls the Scripture's foundational notion of "the healing of creation" as a feminist-biblical principle; Rosemary Radford Ruether holds up the critique of domination, as it is found especially in the prophets, as the (Hebrew) Bible's basic message

for feminist women. A unique and interesting development is Klara Butting's proposal (see 3.4.1).

A further differentiation of this feminist-biblical hermeneutic within the German-speaking world is useful at this point. Represented in this phenomenon are women exegetes who, either before the emergence of the feminist movement or at a certain distance from it, worked at a revised interpretation of Scripture while clearly articulating that their interest was in theological practice. These women exegetes, however, made no strict distinction between interpretation of a text and historical reconstruction and, moreover, favored an individualizing formulation of the nonpatriarchal principle. For example, one can already see this in Anna Paulsen (see 1.3.2), who presupposed, and was herself engaged in, historical-exegetical work. Whatever affirmed that women, too, are in the image and likeness of God, she had called the "prophetic" thread of the Bible. She understood this to be the nonpatriarchal dimension of tradition as described above. It is against this that she measures passages of Scripture problematic to women. In a manner similar to Anna Paulsen, Maria Sybilla Heister, a now-retired Protestant minister, names the central theological-anthropological assertion in the Bible, the First Testament to be precise, against which the history of Israel and the New Testament is to be tested. It is also the statement against which theology and ecclesiastical practice today must let themselves be tested: man and woman are in the image of God (Gen. 1:26f.). In their respectively different being, man and woman are in a dialogical relation to God and to one another. Wherever the dialogical principle was disregarded in relation to women, it was done to the detriment of everybody. Thus, the women of ancient Israel, who had to put up with severe restrictions in cult and society, did not accidentally become the opening for foreign, idolatrous cults that offered them room to move. Heister interprets historical factors directly in terms of biblical theology (regarding the biblical portrayal of history as the faithful mirror of historical events). The Catholic exegete and longtime teacher of women and men pastoral associates in Freiburg, Annemarie Ohler, focuses more directly and soberly on the actual patriarchal context of the biblical world. She published two monographs, *Women in the Bible* and *Motherhood*; she argued that at the heart of Scripture was not the male, but God's free saving activity which is made manifest in and also through women. Both of these women intend to show that women may find a deepened, spiritual rootedness in the Bible's traditions of redemptive history. Naturally and without fanfare, the engagement of women in church and society is to grow, as if to

be taken for granted, from this insight. Here, one does not speak of "the rights of Christians" or of "women's rights" as these would be foreign notions.

There are women exegetes who represent the "hermeneutic of revision" and yet explicitly understand themselves to be feminist theologians. In other words, they do not shy away from combining the conclusions they established exegetically with a critique of existing social and ecclesial conditions and from taking up the "cause of women." But they also maintain that embedded in the androcentric perspective of the texts are to be found elements of understanding the world or the reality of life that are relevant to and even specific to women. These may be used as elements of current feminist-biblical theology without becoming in their substance part of a guiding principle. Helen Schüngel-Straumann, the Roman Catholic professor of biblical theology at Kassel, is one of these exegetes. While attentive to how the history of interpretation of a text and the consequences of the text itself have often yielded that text to misogyny, she also consciously seeks to bring into awareness (again) biblical traditions that had been supplanted or forgotten. Her monograph *Die Frau am Anfang* (Woman at the Beginning) shows very well how these two aims are combined; her studies on the Spirit as creative life force and on "God as Mother in Hosea 11" highlight the recollection of biblical images of God determined by the reality of women, so that use can be made of them in theology—and not only in feminist theology (see 1.2.3). A similar aim is followed, albeit in a more narrative manner, by Virginia Mollenkott's study on forgotten images of God, *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Image of God as Female*, and by Eva Schirmér in *Müttergeschichten* (Stories of Mothers).

Klara Butting (see 3.4.1); Maria Sybilla Heister, *Frauen in der biblischen Glaubensgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1984); Marie-Louise Henry, *Hüte Dein Denken und Wollen: Attestamentliche Studien, mit einem Beitrag zur feministischen Theologie*, ed. Bernd Janowski (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1992); Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female* (New York: Crossroad, 1983); Annemarie Ohler, *Frauen gestalten in der Bibel* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1987); idem, *Mutterschaft in der Bibel* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1992); Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Interpretation: A Method of Correlation," in Letty M. Russell, ed., *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 111–24; Letty M. Russell, "Authority and

the Challenge of Feminist Interpretation," in Russell, ed., *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 137–46; Helen Schüngel-Straumann (see 1.2.3); Eva Schirmér, *Müttergeschichten: Frauen aus dem Alten Testament erzählen aus ihrem Leben* (Offenbach, 1986); Phyllis Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," *JAAR* 41 (1973): 30–48.

### 2.1.4 The Hermeneutic of the "Eternal Feminine"

The hermeneutic of revision insists that a divine reality is to be found in the Bible even though it is admittedly steeped in androcentrism and sexism. This reality transcends such historically factual deformations and has revealed itself as enabling both men's and women's full humanness. This is not enough, however, for the fourth type of feminist-biblical hermeneutics. The Bible may continue to claim validity for today only if the divinity to which it points is essentially comprehended in symbols of the Great Feminine. This can happen only if the Great Goddess, whom the history of humankind and the individual psyche set forth as the primal source and who alone can be the ground of a theology and spirituality that respond to the challenges of today, also defines the God of the Bible. Osiek calls this hermeneutic "sublimationist." The existence of corresponding structures in the world of biblical Israel, the New Testament, and in the history of Christianity (and Judaism) serves in this "hermeneutic of the eternal feminine" as evidence in support of the universal validity of a "matriarchal" *Weltanschauung*, one which sees the Goddess and the cosmos as fused into one another.

Clara Colby of the team around *The Woman's Bible* (see 1.1) is a representative of the "new," that is, symbolic, thinking. As such, she may be regarded as an example of this type of hermeneutics, as may the contemporary feminist reader of Scripture, Gerda Weiler (see also Christa Muelack, 1.2.2). In Weiler's view, the original matriarchal religion of Israel has the Goddess-hero structure and is pervaded by the symbol of the cosmic Goddess and her son-lover who dies and must be given new birth every year. The return to such a religion, its powerful cultic-liturgical shape, its repudiation of an ethic of good and evil, its orientation toward protecting and advancing life, and its cyclical understanding of time will pave the way toward a spirituality of women as well as men. For Weiler, it is a spirituality that, especially at the present time, will help overcome divisions of every kind.

Matriarchal-feminist hermeneutics claims to offer a rigorously woman-centered perspective that not only brings together material

"about" women but also interprets it specific to women. The suggestive power of this hermeneutic resides in its conception of a cosmic web of women of all times and continents, brought forward methodologically by a depth-psychological reading of Scripture on the one hand and ritual or aesthetic appropriation on the other. This is meant to bridge the "nasty ditch," so much lamented in theology, between the world of the Bible and ours and to give women today the feeling of an encompassing sisterhood. The newly won security in the bottomless mechanics of critique (including feminist critique) ultimately derives from the female body as that which signals the utmost communality of women. That focus brings to view clearly the story of how the Bible was passed on from one generation of Christians to the next as the thrice-woven story of exploitation and domination of nature, enmity to the body and sexuality, and oppression of women on grounds of gender only. However necessary it is critically to confront patriarchal-feminist hermeneutics, for example, for its quite uncritical embrace of expert men, such as Robert Rankin Graves or Carl Gustav Jung, its anti-Judaism (see 2.4.1), or its fundamental melding of Goddess and cosmos, this particular perspective remains a constant and critical "thorn" of the Christian feminist endeavor.

Doris Brockmann, *Ganze Menschen—ganze Götter: Kritik der Jung-Rezeption im Kontext feministisch-theologischer Theoriebildung* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1991); *Schlängenbrut*, issues no. 42 (1993), "Erfundene Wirklichkeit? Patriarchatsforschung," and no. 44 (1994), "Göttin—kein abgeschlossenes Kapitel"; Marie-Theres Wacker, "Die Göttin kehrt zurück: Kritische Sichtung neuerer Entwürfe," in Marie-Theres Wacker, ed., *Der Gott der Männer und die Frauen* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1987), 11–37; idem, "Göttinnen," in *Neues Handbuch theologischer Grundbegriffe*, 2d ed., vol. 4 (Munich: Kösel Verlag, 1991), 266–72; Gerda Weiler (see 1.2.2).

## 2.1.5 The Hermeneutic of Liberation

The fifth type is the approach of feminist liberation theology; its notable mark is that it locates itself decidedly in the modern women's movement. For this reason, the hermeneutic of liberation sets out from theologies for which the heart of biblical revelation is that, in God's sight, every human being becomes a subject (as political theologies like Johann Baptist Metz's maintain). Yet those theologies are found to be an insufficient

foundation under prevailing conditions. The hermeneutic of liberation demands that the litmus test be how women are seen to become subjects. In distinction from "revisionist" hermeneutics, it seeks to do exegesis and to be about liberating praxis, not merely side by side, but actually to hold them together in one comprehensive hermeneutical conception. Engagement on behalf of women becoming subjects, as an option of theological practice for a woman exegete, charts the feminist and critical path for her historical-exegetical labor; in turn, her exegetical-scholarly labor remains connected to the feminist movement. This hermeneutic is close to the fourth type mentioned earlier, because it holds scholarship and praxis together. It insists just as resolutely that all scholarship is inseparable from its location, thereby exposing that, rather than being universal or objective, much of prevalent discourse is actually androcentric. (See 2.2.2 and 2.2.3.) It follows from this statement that the existing women's community of interpretation must be regarded as the hermeneutical center of both the hermeneutic of "liberation" and of the "eternal feminine." This is because only with that community can the androcentric perspective of the Bible, how it was received in history and what it brought about, be truly broken. In the absence of such community, "revisionist" hermeneutics is in danger of uncritically identifying androcentric philanthropy and women-centered visions. But feminist liberation-theology hermeneutics, unlike that of the fourth type, does not lean to a feminism of the "natural-feminine." It leans toward a feminism of justice or of toil for equality. Its understanding of the community of interpretation, among other things, makes that quite clear. The feminism of the "eternal feminine" views this community as a cosmic natural, as it were, organic community of women of "one substance" with the Goddess. It seeks to actualize it in mystical-spiritual fashion. The hermeneutic of liberation sees this community as one of ethical decision making and political engagement on behalf of all (women) becoming subjects.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's work, which was groundbreaking for the German-speaking context as well, represents this type. Her reconstruction of Christian origins, as found in numerous articles and, above all, in her monograph *In Memory of Her*, serves to give Christian women today a feminist theological foundation for their liberation-seeking faith and action. According to the hermeneutical system, which she has depicted above all in her *Bread Not Stone*, feminist exegesis must set out from a "hermeneutic of suspicion," not only against the patriarchal monopolizing of Scripture throughout the history of interpretation, but

also against the androcentrism of Scripture itself. A text that seems to speak positively about women is not therefore directly applicable to feminist purposes but must first be analyzed for the "systemic androcentrism" which pervades Scripture. But whenever there are tensions and contradictions in New Testament descriptions and judgments about women, a "hermeneutic of remembrance" may infer an early Christian movement in which women and men committed to Jesus were part of a "discipleship of equals." What constitutes the movement is an encompassing well-being which Jesus himself lived and taught and which was subsequently taken up by his followers and passed on, a well-being that becomes concrete in the economy and politics, in ethics and theology. For this reason, it has a direct and critical impact on patriarchy. It is essential for Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza that the step from the text to the historical context be taken, because such a step alone allows one to move forward from a mere cultural critique of the text to a critique of structures of power dominant in the past and the present, and to the requisite transformation. In like manner, such a step brings out more clearly the actual part of women in the shaping of early Christianity. At the same time, it stimulates critical opposition to the marginalization of women that is already apparent in the sacred writings and, more so still, in the history of Christianity. Christian women today, who understand themselves to be followers of Jesus and who wish to live out this "discipleship of equals" are, as an "ecclesia of women" in the very heart of the church itself, a critical challenge to the existing structures of the church which, being patriarchal, are not appropriate to the gospel.

Schüssler Fiorenza's proposal of a "hermeneutic of liberation" has been criticized, among others, by the feminist New Testament women scholars Lone Fatum (Denmark) and Carolyn Osiek (United States). Although differing in their emphases, both are concerned that historical study that is bound to a biased feminist option cannot adequately discern conditions in antiquity. Such study will only confuse historical exegetical reconstructions with systematic-theological legitimization of what today's feminist theologians are demanding. This critique is grounded in some of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's own formulations, which are at times open to misunderstanding. Such critique may point to different basic decisions in feminist hermeneutics that need to become subject to discussions in critical solidarity beyond the domain of feminist exegesis.

A feminist exegetical "hermeneutic of liberation" within the German-speaking context will have to be attentive to the specific location of femi-

nist exegesis in three of the world's richest countries. Because of such privilege, it will also need to make every effort to listen and to make known the voices of women from the context of the so-called Third World. The least that can be done at this point is to declare this desideratum and to name some of the women who, in their various contexts, work for an interpretation of the Bible by and for women that is oriented by liberation theology: Teresa Okure (Nigeria), Elisabeth Dominguez (Philippines), Elsa Tamez (Costa Rica), and Ivoni Richter Reimer, Alicia Winters, and Tania Mara Vieira Sampaio (all Brazil). The first feminist-liberation theological reading of Scripture from Japan is that of Hisako Kinukawa. A valuable source of information from Latin America is the annual publication *Bibliografía Bíblica Latino-Americana*, edited by Milton Schwantes (São Paulo: Programa Ecueménico de Pós-Graduação em Ciências da Religião, 1988-).

Elisabeth Dominguez, "New Testament Reflections on Political Power," in John S. Pobee et al., eds., *New Eyes for Reading: Biblical and Theological Reflections by Women from the Third World* (Geneva: WCC, 1986), 45-49; Lone Fatum, "Image of God and Glory of Men: Women in Pauline Congregations," in Kari E. Børresen, ed., *Image of God and Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian Tradition* (Oslo: Solum Forlag, 1991), 56-136; idem, "Women, Symbolic Universe, and Structures of Silence: Challenges and Possibilities in Androcentric Texts," *Studia Theologia* 43 (1989): 61-80; Hisako Kinukawa, *Women and Jesus in Mark* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994); Teresa Okure, "Feminist Interpretations in Africa," in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., *Searching the Scriptures*, vol. 1 (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 76-85; idem, "The Johannine Approach to Mission: A Contextual Study of John 4:1-42," WUNT, 2d ser., vol. 31 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1988); idem, "Women in the Bible," in Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye, eds., *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988), 47-59; Carolyn Osiek (see 2.1); Ivoni Richter Reimer, *Frauen in der Apostelgeschichte des Lukas* (see 1.2.3); idem, "Widerstand und Hoffnung," in Dorothee Sölle et al., eds., *Für Gerechtigkeit streiten* (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser and Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1994), 66-70; Tania Mara Vieira Sampaio, "El cuerpo excluido de su dignidad: Una propuesta de lectura feminista de Oseas 4," *RIBLA* 15 (1993): 35-46; idem, "Die Entmilitarisierung und die Befreiung zu einem Leben in Würde bei Hosea," *Texte und Kontexte* 16, no. 57 (1993): 44-55—see

terms of patriarchy. Since such structures were not restricted to Greece and Rome, the term is suitable for the general characterization of the "rule of the fathers" and its concrete result in the juridical, political, and economic dependency of women, children, and serfs.

There is a shift in the meaning of *patriarchy* whenever it is used as a counterconcept to *matriarchy*. The latter, too, was originally a concept of law and politics, signifying certain forms of social organization that were defined not in terms of the father but the mother (maternal right of succession, use of the mother's surname, matrilocality of marriage, and so forth). "Matriarchal" traces in this sense may, indeed, be found in the Hebrew Bible; they are listed, for example, in the work of Werner Plautz. But since the concept of matriarchy was introduced to the German-speaking world in connection with Swiss legal historian Johann Jakob Bachofen's thesis of a primordial gynaiocracy in world history, it has taken on a meaning that reaches far beyond that. According to Bachofen, patriarchy as it currently exists was preceded in the history of development by an age of women, the foundation of which is laid in "the nature of women," namely motherhood, which is also a profoundly religious mystery and which elevates woman to the level of religious being *per se*. The early gynaiocracies were in every aspect shaped by religion; faith in the oneness of essence of woman, earth, cosmos, and nature guided all of life. Such basic Bachofenian concepts have been positively appropriated and expanded even by women and have left their imprint on the approach to matriarchal feminism. *Matriarchy* refers here to that form of society that includes the religion of the cosmic Goddess and her son-lover, a religion aligned with the cycles of nature and seen to be the source and basis of the orders of society. Its opposite is *patriarchy*, referring to that order of society which is determined by a religion or ideology of male monotheism. It is a religion also which seeks to eliminate the divine-feminine and aspires to dominate the whole cosmos. In its soil grow contempt of woman and of nature; in such a religion, it is inevitable that the law and ethics of its society develop from rules and orders that were not derived from the natural-internal but from what is external.

Feminist exegesis also encounters the term *patriarchy* in the sense of referring to the "primal father." In traditional translations of the Bible, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are called "the patriarchs," and the New Testament already speaks of David (Acts 7:8), the twelve sons of Jacob (Acts 2:29), and Abraham (Heb. 7:4) as "patriarchs." An additional meaning is applied to the term in scholarly exegesis, namely that of the concrete

also *RIBLA* 8 (1991): 70–81; idem, *Mulher uma prioridade profética em Oseias* (São Paulo: Instituto Metodista de Ensino Superior, São Bernardo do Campo, 1990); Helen Schüngel-Straumann and Christine Schaumberger, "Bibel," in *WbFTh*, 49–58; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone* (see 1.1); idem, *In Memory of Her* (see 1.1), chap. 1; Elsa Tamez, *The Amnesty of Grace: Justification by Faith from a Latin American Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993); idem, "The Woman Who Complicated the History of Salvation," in Pöbbe et al., eds., *New Eyes for Reading*, 5–17; idem, "Women's Rereading the Bible," in Fabella and Oduyoye, eds., *With Passion and Compassion*, 173–180; Alicia Winters, "La memoria subversiva de una mujer: II Samuel 21, 1–14," *RIBLA* 13 (1993): 77–86; idem, "La mujer en el Israel premonárquico," *RIBLA* 15 (1993): 19–34.

## 2.2 Basic Categories of Feminist Exegesis

There are certain determinative concepts in feminist praxis and scholarly literature that have also become part of feminist exegesis. The following list of definitions and brief annotations are not to be taken as a final lexicon but as an invitation to further discussion and clarification.

### 2.2.1 Patriarchy/Matriarchy

The primary concern of the feminist movement (and, correspondingly, of feminist scholarship) is to trace the mechanisms of women's suppression, functioning in society and in individual lives. It is developing alternative plans of action or perspectives that enables women to achieve their full humanity. In this connection, the term *patriarchy* is frequently used to give a name to the complex of all those forces that oppose this aim. Therefore, patriarchy is foremost a concept of struggle. Its analytical meaning is brought into view best by its historical location. Since Aristotle, patriarchy has been a concept of law or politics referring to the concrete dominance exercised by the *pater familias* over his household, that is, his physical family (spouse and children) as well as his male and female wage earners and slaves. This view of patriarchy also signals the economic component of the concept or the social reality it embodied. In such an economic-social structure of domestic life, legal and political power was restricted to the *pater familias* (or at least to the extensive rights accorded him). The entire organism of state was guided by the

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family structure found in biblical Israel, including the age of Jesus. Two interpreters of the New Testament, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Luise Schottroff, have made very poignant use of the concept and its concomitant juridical-political-sociological perspective. In harmony with their liberation theology approach, they intend to call attention to the need for feminist labor to "keep its feet firmly on the ground" and to devote its energies on concrete political and social structures if the liberation of women is truly to succeed. Because of the danger of being interpreted too narrowly, it has been proposed by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza that *patriarchy* might be replaced by *kyriarchy*.

Donat Pahnke, "Matriarchat," in *WbTh*, 283-85; Werner Plautz, "Zur Frage des Mutterrechts im AT," *ZAW* 74 (1962): 9-30; Christine Schaumberger and Luise Schottroff, "Patriarchat," in *WbTh*, 319-22; Luise Schottroff, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters* (see 1.2.3), 17-42; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); Beate Wagner-Hasel, ed., *Matriarchatstheorien der Altertumswissenschaften*, Wege der Forschung 651 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1992).

## 2.2.2 Patriarchy—Androcentrism—Sexism

In appropriating the concept *patriarchy*, feminist (exegetical) analysis has opted for a theory of feminism in which attention to concretely existing women, including the class and age they belong to, has priority over speculations about "the feminine." It is a choice for a theory which depicts the domination of women as an aspect of the domination by the man who, on the basis of his procreation of sons, lays claim to authority over nonfathers. Since for that very reason the "analysis of patriarchy" is first and foremost analysis of social conditions, the category of *androcentrism* fits more readily into the feminist exegetical task of reading texts. The term refers to conceptions, patterns of ideas, and thought structures and gives a name to the fact that cultural expressions of patriarchal societies present themselves entirely as man-centered. Often, language sees the male human being (*Mann*) and human being (*Mensch*) as identical. Philosophy ranks the male attributes of what is immaterial and rational before the female ones of what is connected with the body and the sensual. Religion is about a father-god, whom the spiritual fathers represent on earth. The orientation of ethics is in terms of norms rather than relations, and so forth. In short, woman is seen as the man's

"other." With very few exceptions, such as the Song of Songs, the Bible may be spoken of in its entirety as an androcentric literature. Such androcentrism becomes sexist when it turns into the ideological basis for the exclusion of women, solely as women, from certain activities that it seeks to safeguard for men, solely as men. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the arguments against women's rights to vote were strongly sexist. They were intended to keep women bound to home and family because of their "nature." The argumentation the official teaching of Rome presents against the admission of women to the office of priest bears features of sexism because the biological dissimilarity of women to the man Jesus of Nazareth represents for it a decisive criterion for exclusion. And finally, the argument of 1 Tim. 2:12-15 is sexist because it dispossesses women of ecclesiastical authorization to teach and counsels them instead that their way to salvation lies in giving birth to children.

Ina Praetorius, "Androzentrismus," in *WbTh*, 14-16.

## 2.2.3 Femininity—Gender Difference—Gender Complicity

Feminist theory formation must address the basic issue of whether it is possible to specify the category of *femininity* in order to provide grounding, both epistemologically as well as in terms of "subject areas," for a discourse of feminist science. Definitions of *femininity* cover a broad range, beginning with citing natural or quasi-invariable factors like the ability to give birth to and nurse children. Or, they cite the cultural factor seen to be nearly universal, namely, that mothers and women are charged with raising small children. Such definitions draw on cultural studies and conceive of "femininity" as a conglomerate of specific roles which may well prove constant in history and geography but are in principle open to being changed. The process of defining *femininity* extends all the way to the refusal of substantive determination and to the willing movement toward an open, utopian understanding of femininity. In relation to feminist exegesis and its historiographical work, the first two of these "definitions" of femininity come more readily to hand in describing the biblical picture, whereas experimenting with the utopian understanding is hermeneutically more fascinating. That is because this latter understanding looks less at "similarities" between then and now. It focuses more on "falsifications" and the overturning of gender identities that are occasionally hinted at in the Bible. (For example, in 1 Samuel

1-2, Hannah is loved by her marriage partner "in spite" of her childlessness, and she does not keep the longed-for son but gives him away.)

The distinction between *sex* and *gender*, between biological and (culturally) attributed sex, cuts across the categorization of *femininity*. Even though this distinction may be viewed as the result of feminist scholarly reflection, it is nonetheless "neutral" for feminism because it simply stipulates that not only time, space/location, and class and race, but also people's sex deeply shapes their history and that characteristics attributed to sex constitute an important element of cultural values and norms. Increasingly, the perspective of "gender research" finds acceptance also in the established sciences. Within the feminist agenda, an important contribution to biblical gender research is the joint work of the Israeli biblical scholar Athalya Brenner and the Dutch woman exegete Fokkelen van Dijk-Hemmes. They explore the conditions and possibilities for tracing texts back to male or female "origins" and what meaning and usefulness such an undertaking has. (See 3.1.3.) The Danish New Testament scholar Lone Fatum also understands her feminist exegetical work as "gender orientated" and combines this approach with an explicit critique of "biased" feminist hermeneutics (see 2.1.5).

In its beginning, feminism tended to perceive women one-sidedly in the role of victims, and/or equally one-sidedly, it advocated an exodus to a gynocentric counterworld. By contrast, current feminist scholarship seeks to discern the ever-existing entanglement of women in the history of patriarchy. It was Christina Thürmer-Rohr who introduced the concept *Mittäterschaft*, complicity, and set the tone for the discussion in the German-speaking world. Paying attention to the complicity of women may protect one against reconstructing something like an intact time of origin in history; it urges, instead, the development of historical models that are less concerned with showing how things evolved. Such models are more interested in women's experiences of oppression and their liberating struggles but also in their accommodative practices, all of which are present and must be made visible for every epoch. (See 9.1.)

On femininity: Doris Brockmann (see 2.1.4), 35-44.

On gender: Athalya Brenner and Fokkelen van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1993); Peggy L. Day, ed., *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989); Lone Fatum (see 2.1.5).

On complicity: Christine Schaubberger and Luise Schottroff, *Schuld und Macht* (see 1.2.3); Studienschwerpunkt "Frauenforschung" and Technical University Berlin, eds., *Mittäterschaft und Entdeckungslust* (Berlin: Orlanda-Verlag, 1989); Christina Thürmer-Rohr, *Vagabonding: Feminist Thinking Cut Loose* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991).

## 2.2.4 Objectivity—Partiality

For all intents and purposes, the ground has disappeared from under the scholarly ideal of striving for the "pure" cognition of an object to be known. Its disappearance is a result of the insistence of the sociology of knowledge that everyone seeking knowledge is bound to her and his context. Even the determination of one's object of study is not independent of the studying subject; the scholarly methods of researching "objects" contain what is by no means a universal but all too often a very particularistic hermeneutic. The history of research has its own gravity which retards or prevents necessary paradigm shifts. Sciences said to be only and wholly "interested in their objects of study" are involved by institutional or economic ties in a web of presuppositions, predeterminations, and dependencies. The impact of these on scholarship should be worked out rather than denied or ignored. It is from this point of view that feminist science criticizes the current business of scholarship which, in actual fact, is still almost exclusively a male domain shaped by ideological androcentrism and robust patriarchal structures. Feminist scholarship is fully conscious of its partiality in that, in relation both to the "object" of its research and the purpose and application of it, it consciously places women at the center. Feminist research focuses single-mindedly (but by no means in a narrow sense) on the reality of women. It looks for ways that assist women in particular to achieve subjecthood. This does not imply that proven methodologies will be abandoned or that communication with male scholarship will cease; what it does mean is that dominant structures will be subjected to critical scrutiny and undergo feminist transformation. (See 2.1.5.)

Hedwig Meyer-Wilmes, *Rebellion auf der Grenze* (Freiburg, Basel, and Vienna: Herder Verlag, 1990), pt. 3; Ulrike Müller-Markus, "Parteilichkeit," in *WbTh*, 315-17; Luise Schottroff, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995), pt. 1.2.3.

## 2.3 The Question of the Biblical Canon

Feminist Christian exegesis cannot avoid taking up the fact that the canon of Scripture is fixed, that the Bible is a given and determined corpus. For exegetical-historical work in the narrower sense of reconstructing historical connections, this givenness of the canon seems to be a minor problem. On this level it can be readily admitted that a "patriarchal selection" (Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza) of the sources did indeed take place. It resulted in a minimal basis for resources in women's history. For this reason, historical-exegetical work must go beyond the writings in the biblical canon for its exploration of the sources. The apocryphal and pseudepigraphical writings of both the First and New Testaments need to be included as well as the contemporary literature of the political/cultural superpowers (Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Greece, and Rome). Finally, the numerous, but mostly brief, epigraphical sources of Israel's/Palestine's neighbors need to be included. However, one must also include nonwritten "sources," above all iconography and archaeologically produced materials such as remains of buildings, contents of tombs, bones, and even seeds of grain, all of which yield valuable clues to everyday life, not least to the lives of women in biblical times (see 3.4.1 and 3.4.2).

The givenness of the biblical canon raises sharper problems for a theology which in a feminist mode seeks to discern its foundation in Scripture. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has suggested that the process of formation of the New Testament canon paralleled the increasing exclusion of women from ecclesiastical offices. If this is so, it raises the problem, certainly in relation to the question of office, that only such texts that seemed congenial to excluding women from those offices were deemed inspired by those whose aim it was to exclude women. In relation to the First Testament, feminist exegetes from the churches of the Reformation must deal with the fact that important wisdom writings (Sirach, Wisdom, as well as Baruch) are not counted among their sacred writings. Therefore, little canonical material is available to them in developing a biblical theology of Wisdom bridging the two testaments. That is why the community of interpretation of critical women is essential. While not reversing the patriarchal selection, it nonetheless makes the canon, understood as a fixed selection of sacred writings claiming authority, the subject of critical discussion. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza proposes to distinguish between the Bible as "archetype" and the Bible as "proto-

type." Understood as archetype, it is as if the Bible had fallen from the sky as God's universally valid Word, independent of time and context. A prototypical understanding holds that the Bible not only became historical but that it must be brought into relation with new situations as they arise. Notwithstanding the fact that Christian identity is unthinkable without recourse to the Bible, in communities of faith the Bible must be ratified ever anew as Holy Scripture.

Claudia Camp, an American feminist exegete unassociated with a mainline church, has sketched three models of dealing with Scripture as authority in feminist-Christian hermeneutics: (1) The *dialogical authority model*: it proceeds from the words to persons (especially women) and stresses the community of believers from biblical Israel up to the present. (2) The *metaphor model*: it begins with the word of Scripture and views the Bible as "poetic classic"; "classic" in terms of its capability of calling forth new appropriations right into our own time, and "poetic" in that it unveils what the Word declares. (3) The *liminal model*: it reads Scripture from the margins, taking seriously the demarcations and rejections found in biblical writings, applying them to itself and then taking them back to the texts in a critically creative way. This is "reading as a foreign woman," against the text, subversively.

Claudia Camp, "Feminist Theological Hermeneutics: Canon and Christian Identity," in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., *Searching the Scriptures*, vol. 1 (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 154-91; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone* (see 1.1), 12ff. and 36ff.; idem, *In Memory of Her* (see 1.1), chap. 8.

## 2.4 Christian Feminist Anti-Judaism?

The history of Christian exegesis of both the First and New Testaments is accompanied by and entangled in anti-Judaism. Reference has already been made to the model of interpretation developed in nineteenth-century Protestant exegesis of the decline of Israel into the legalistic Judaism of postexilic times and the related theory of the "prophetic connection." This model not only turned Jesus into a non-Jew who, as a true believer in YHWH, embraced only what was genuinely Israelite. Such interpretation also repudiated the Judaism of Jesus' time, and its subsequent history until now, as petrified and ultimately alien to God.

Until well after World War II, that is, long after the Shoah, at both university and parish-practice levels, Protestant and Catholic interpretations worked on the basis of premises in biblical and systematic theology that held the Christian interpretation of the First Testament to be the only truly valid one. Judaism was, in a manner of speaking, dispossessed of its Scripture since it was held to be a false road, or worse still, a deliberate repudiation of revelation in Jesus Christ. Even though it is not yet generally accepted, it is now at least possible within Christianity to speak of God's first and never abrogated covenant, which Judaism continues to this day. Next to it, there is a second covenant—or better, a second step in that first covenant—that rendered God's revelation accessible to “heathen” women and men, so that in the perspective of Christians and in gratitude for the establishment of this new covenant, both ways are to be acknowledged as genuine ways to God.

For a long time, feminist rereading of Scripture did not detect this deeply rooted and widespread Christian anti-Judaism. Not until the late 1970s, when Jewish feminists in the United States began to speak and write openly about anti-Jewish trends in Christian feminist theology, did the discussion begin. In Germany, it began on a broader basis only in the second half of the 1980s; it was the time of the *Historikertreit* (the feud of the historians) when in broad sectors of society Germany's anti-Semitic past and how it could be overcome historically was bitterly debated. At this time, it had also just begun to be possible within feminism to move on from a phase of “sisterhood,” in which all differences were subordinated, to a more differentiated and self-critical (re)formulation of feminist postulates and utopias.

Charlotte Klein—“Pionierin der Verständigung” (Bendorf: Hedwig-Dransfeld-Haus, 1992); Charlotte Klein, *Anti-Judaism in Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978); Johanna Kohn, *Ha-shoah: Christlich-jüdische Verständigung nach Auschwitz* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser; Mainz: Grünewald Verlag, 1986); Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974); Leonore Siegle-Wenschkewitz, “Antijudaismus,” in *WbJTh*, 22–24; Erich Zenger, *Am Fuss des Sinai: Gottesbilder des Ersten Testaments* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1993); idem, *Das Erste Testament: Die jüdische Bibel und die Christen* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1991); idem, *Ein Gott der Rache?* (Freiburg, Basel, and Vienna: Herder Verlag, 1994).

## 2.4.1 The Issues at the Heart of the Debate

In the eyes of Christian feminist women who study New Testament traditions of patriarchy, the narratives about Jesus' dealings with women appear to be a suitable point of departure for a biblically based feminist critique of patriarchy. For those accounts are about women disciples who followed Jesus, about ill and, for that reason, marginalized women to whom Jesus gives back their human dignity. They are also about the theological disputes between Jesus and women and may indeed function as thorns in the flesh for the church's domestication and marginalization of women. But whenever Jesus, the friend of women, or even Jesus, the “feminist” (see still Leonard Swidler, *Yeshua: A Model for Moderns* [1988]), is set against a bleak foil of the allegedly thoroughly misogynist Judaism of his time, the historical reality of Judaism is disfigured in anti-Jewish terms. Here, the figure of Jesus himself is elevated to a woman-positive “liveried divinity” (Karl Rahner coined the phrase *Gott in Livree*) as well as being deprived of his concrete humanity as a Jew of his particular time. In the language of dogmatics, this is anti-Judaism as the flip side of Monophysitism. In relation to Paul, who did indeed manifest a fairly ambivalent position toward women, the framework of interpretation that offers itself even to feminists seems to be what has already been referred to above in connection with Anna Paulsen. She had suggested that either Paul was split between Jewish tradition and Christian conversion or else that the basic impulse of early Christianity was in the process of being re-Judaized. This, too, is anti-Jewish insofar as what is Jewish is charged, both in terms of individuals and structures, with obscuring what is genuinely Christian.

Feminist critique of the Hebrew Bible, that is, the Christian Old Testament, fell victim to anti-Judaism especially where it sought to bring to light or revitalize buried traditions of the Goddess. One the one hand, this applies specifically to language and the adoption of the anti-Semitic jargon of the Nazis in some feminist presentations. On the other hand, it applies to the uncritical reception of literature (from the pen of “expert men”) which not infrequently was itself the bearer of anti-Jewish clichés. The basic pattern of feminist revision of the history of biblical Israel is also subject to anti-Judaism. Truly, it is no longer a matter of dispute that the veneration of one or more goddesses was no merely marginal matter in ancient Israel, and one must surely speak of goddess worship being pushed back and decried as heresy in postexilic Israel. But when

early Jewish groups, to whom the Goddess was a thorn in the side, are identified simply with *the* Jews, without any kind of time reference, the result is a limited historical focus that cuts out the real multistagedness of 2,500 years of Judaism and finally becomes anti-Jewish. First, Christians accused Jews of killing God by crucifying Jesus; now, as critical Jewish feminists put it, feminists accuse Jews of killing the Goddess. What is more, relatively simplistic lines are drawn from the effects of the opposition of early Judaism to the Goddess to the male-instrumental rationality that rules today, as well as to the destruction of nature and the enmity toward eroticism and sensuousness. Such connections once again put Jews in the role of scapegoats for false developments or detours. But these may be explained seriously only through differentiated, historical analysis in which Christianity's history of guilt is taken as seriously as the specific problems of modernity (the roots of which are in Western Europe);

Charlotte Kohn-Ley and Ilse Korotin, eds., *Der feministische "Sündenfall?" Antisemitische Vorurteile in der Frauenbewegung* (Vienna: Picus, 1994), with articles by Susanne Heine, Hannelore Schröder, Ilse Korotin, Johanna Gehmacher, Susannah Heschel, Anita Nassenienig, Charlotte Kohn-Ley, and Maria Wölflingseder; Christine Schaumberger, ed., . . . *weil wir nicht vergessen wollen: Zu einer feministischen Theologie im deutschen Kontext* (Münster: Morgana-Frauenbuchverlag, 1987), with articles by Christine Schaumberger, Rita Bürrichter, Johanna Kohn, and Anette Kliewer; Luise Schottroff, "Antijudaismus im Neuen Testament" in *Befreiungserfahrungen* (see 1.2.3), 217-28; idem, "Die 'Schuld der Juden' und die Entschuldung des Pilatus in der deutschen neutestamentlichen Wissenschaft seit 1945," in *Befreiungserfahrungen*, 324-57; Leonore Siegele-Wenschkewitz, ed., *Verdrängte Vergangenheit, die uns bedrängt* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1988), with articles by Susannah Heschel, Eveline Goodman-Thau, Leonore Siegele-Wenschkewitz, Jutta Flatters, Marie-Theres Wacker, Bernd Wacker, Luise Schottroff, and Dieter Georgi; Katharina von Kellenbach, *Anti-Judaism in Christian-Rooted Feminist Writings: An Analysis of Major U.S. American and West German Feminist Theologians* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994).

See the journal *Kirche und Israel*, vol. 5, nos. 1 and 2, with articles by Judith Plaskow, Asphodel P. Long, Leonore Siegele-Wenschkewitz, Fokkelen van Dijk-Hemmes, and Marie-Theres Wacker; see also *Schlangenbrut*, vols. 16-18 (1987), and the debate there on feminist anti-Judaism.

## 2.4.2 How to Meet Anti-Judaism

Feminist exegetes and theologians may counter anti-Judaism in two ways: negatively, with a precise knowledge of its manifestations and, positively, with as thorough an acquaintance as possible of the history of Judaism and the self-awareness of contemporary Jewish women and men. The first way includes Germans allowing the specifically German history of Christian anti-Judaism and racist anti-Semitism to encounter them as their own negative history and working hard to deal with it. It also includes the very critical examining of the literature of scholarly exegesis for anti-Jewish stereotypes. This means scrutinizing language not only for expressions of sexism and androcentrism but, parallel to it, also for those of anti-Judaism. It is important to keep in mind that the Jesus movement was initially a movement within Judaism. It must be understood in the context of contemporary Judaism rather than in an aprioristic separation from it. In addition, the question of the worship and disappearance of female deities in biblical Israel needs to be taken up in conjunction with a particularly sensitive hermeneutic of suspicion about one's own patterns of reconstruction. The second and positive way of countering anti-Judaism includes especially coming to know how Jewish people understand themselves and honoring their understanding of themselves. Seeking out occasions for dialogue and conversation with Jewish women and men (and not only in the German-speaking world) is, therefore, essential.

Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker, eds., *Von der Wurzel getragen: Deutschsprachige christlich-feministische Exegese in Auseinandersetzung mit Antijudaismus* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), with articles by Eveline Valtink, Geburgis Feld, Brigitte Kahl, Johanne Petermann, Ilse Müller, Christl Maier, Marlene Crusemann, Renate Jost, Martina Gnadt, Gerlinde Baumann, Angelika Strotmann, Luise Schottroff, and Marie-Theres Wacker.

## 2.4.3 Jewish Feminist Ways of Dealing with the Bible

The largest number of Jewish feminists live and work primarily in the United States; there are some in Israel as well as in European countries such as England, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. The specific shape of their feminism, the kinds of questions and problems they address,

depends, among other things, on what movement of Judaism they feel they belong to. Women who associate themselves with Orthodox Judaism focus their feminist interests most readily on an interpretation and application of the halakah that is friendly to women, especially the rules governing synagogue worship and family life. Hanna Safrai (Jerusalem and Amsterdam) is a specialist working on rabbinic methodology and theology of women from the period of the Second Temple. Because a German-speaking audience needs to become familiar first with Jewish traditions of interpretation, German-speaking Jewish women like Eveline Goodman-Thau (Halle and Jerusalem, modern orthodox) and Pinna Navé Levinson (for a long time in Heidelberg, now in Jerusalem and Mallorca, liberal Judaism) devote their time speaking and writing explicitly on texts of the Hebrew Bible.

Feminists in the traditions of Reform Judaism have ventured upon the task of questioning the system of the halakah as such, because its androcentrism is amenable to change from within. For example, for Judith Plaskow (New York), going back to the Hebrew Bible is a way of verifying her Jewish history of women, which can or must be recalled or created in the first place by means of feminist *midrashim* (Lilith!). Surely, Judith Plaskow is the one who, to an extent larger than other Jewish feminists, engages in a movement of thought comparable to that of Christian theology, reflecting in that manner her Jewish feminism. It is no coincidence that she and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza worked closely together, for example as coeditors of the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* (1985-). Other Jewish feminists draw on the methods of interpretation of modern historical scholarship or of recent secular literary science. Of note in this context is Adele Reinhartz (Hamilton, Ontario) whose work focuses on texts of the New Testament, especially the Gospel of John, as well as on gender-specific issues, and Ross Kraemer (Philadelphia) and Amy-Jill Levine (Vanderbilt University, Nashville), who study the history and literature of early Judaism and Christianity. T. Drorah Setel (New York) has examined the Book of Hosea in particular against the background of feminist analyses of pornographic literature; Athalya Brenner (Haifa and Amsterdam) has published a literary-sociological study of woman in ancient Israel, as well as numerous articles on the Hebrew Bible in a feminist-literary perspective. She also edits the monograph series *A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, published by Sheffield Academic Press.

Finally, there are feminists with a Jewish background who consciously take up traditions of magic, patriarchy, and goddesses, pleading in the

name of women that Jewish life be transparent to these displaced traditions. Such a feminist is Asphodel Long (England), whose subject is biblical and postbiblical traditions of wisdom. For her, the figure of Wisdom in Jewish literature is a reflection of the archaic and once universally venerated Great Goddess Nature. Savina Teubal, an Argentinean now residing in California, has provided interpretations of biblical texts on the primordial mothers, especially Sarah; according to Teubal, such texts are relics of nonpatriarchal forms of society and religion in early Israel. She wishes to inspire women today to appropriate this inheritance in a creative fashion for themselves.

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## Chapter Three

### Methods of Feminist Exegesis

Feminist exegesis does not develop new methods as such. It is methodologically innovative in organizing the steps taken by a method and in testing them critically. It makes use of existing methods to uncover findings relevant to women or to supplement them with specific ways of asking questions. In doing so, it also examines methods for stated or unstated premises inasmuch as they may block cognition relevant to feminism.

In the last two decades, the tools utilized in methods of scholarly exegesis were supplemented beyond those of classic historical-critical methods by the numerous new approaches in linguistics, literary science, history, ethnology, sociology, religious studies, and psychology. As a result, the already existing multileveled composition of exegetical labor has become even more differentiated in its literary, historical, religious-theological, and existential dimensions. This manifold spectrum is not taught or widely used to its full extent at German-speaking universities and has (still) not been widely received in feminism. The following survey is limited essentially to German-language feminist exegesis; it will refer also to literature from neighboring countries in Europe and, wherever it serves clarification, from the United States.

#### 3.1 Historical Criticism in Feminist Revision

In the German-speaking world, the methods brought together in historical criticism continue as ever to be the most widely used, particularly because a series of newer methods has emerged that has extended both