# MARK

WISDOM COMMENTARY

Volume 42

# Mark

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*In solidarity with all who have experienced*
*from men and/or women*
*violence at home*
*and bullying and harassment in the workplace*

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# *Abbreviations*

| | |
|---|---|
| AB | Anchor Bible Series |
| *ABD* | *Anchor Bible Dictionary* |
| AGJU | Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums |
| ANTC | Abingdon New Testament Commentaries |
| AYB | Anchor Yale Bible |
| *BAR* | *Biblical Archaeology Review* |
| BDAG | Danker, Frederick W., Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) |
| *Bib* | *Biblica* |
| BibInt | Biblical Interpretation Series |
| BJS | Brown Judaic Studies |
| *BTB* | *Biblical Theology Bulletin* |
| *CBQ* | *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* |
| ConBNT | Coniectanea Biblica: New Testament Series |
| *CQ* | *Classical Quarterly* |
| *CurBR* | *Currents in Biblical Research* |
| *EBib* | *Etudes bibliques* |

| | |
|---|---|
| *ExpTim* | *Expository Times* |
| FCB | Feminist Companion to the Bible |
| FCNTECW | Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings |
| GBS | Guides to Biblical Scholarship |
| *HTR* | *Harvard Theological Review* |
| IFT | Introductions in Feminist Theology |
| *JAAR* | *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* |
| *JBL* | *Journal of Biblical Literature* |
| *JFSR* | *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* |
| *JHS* | *Journal of Hellenistic Studies* |
| *JRS* | *Journal of Roman Studies* |
| *JSNT* | *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* |
| JSNTSup | Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series |
| *JSOT* | *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* |
| JSOTSup | Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series |
| *JTS* | *Journal of Theological Studies* |
| LNTS | Library of New Testament Studies |
| LSJ | Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968) |
| LXX | Septuagint |
| *Neot* | *Neotestamentica* |
| *NIDB* | *New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible.* Edited by Katharine Doob Sakenfeld. 5 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 2006–2009. |
| *NovT* | *Novum Testamentum* |
| NovTSup | Supplements to Novum Testamentum |
| *NTS* | *New Testament Studies* |
| OBT | Overtures to Biblical Theology |
| *OGIS* | *Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae*. Edited by Wilhelm Dittenberger. 2 vols. Leipzig: Hirzel, 1903–1905. |

| | |
|---|---|
| SBL | Society of Biblical Literature |
| SBLSP | Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers |
| SemeiaSt | Semeia Studies |
| SFSHJ | South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism |
| *SJT* | *Scottish Journal of Theology* |
| SNTSMS | Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas Monograph Series |
| SP | Sacra Pagina |
| SymS | Symposium Series |
| *TDNT* | *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–1976. |
| *TynBul* | *Tyndale Bulletin* |
| WCS | Wisdom Commentary series |
| WUNT | Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament |
| YCS | Yale Classical Studies |
| *ZAW* | *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* |
| *ZNW* | *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* |

Classical Authors

| | |
|---|---|
| *1 Regn.* | Dio Chrysostom, *De regno i (Or. 1)* |
| *2 Tars.* | Dio Chrysostom, *Tarsica altera* (*Or. 34*) |
| *3 Regn.* | Dio Chrysostom, *De regno iii (Or. 3)* |
| *1 Serv. Lib.* | Dio Chrysostom, *De servitute et libertate (Or. 14)* |
| *Aen.* | Vergil, *Aeneid* |
| *Ag. Ap.* | Josephus, *Against Apion* |
| *Ann.* | Tacitus, *Annals* |
| *Ant.* | Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* |
| *Ant.* | Plutarch, *Antony* |
| *Ant. rom.* | Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates romanae* |
| *Att.* | Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* |

| | |
|---|---|
| *Aug.* | Suetonius, *Divus Augustus* |
| *Bell. Jug.* | Sallust, *Bellum jugurthinum* |
| *Ben.* | Seneca, *De beneficiis* |
| *C. Ap.* | Josephus, *Contra Apionem* |
| *Caes.* | Plutarch, *Caesar* |
| *Cat. Min.* | Plutarch, *Cato Minor* |
| *Clem.* | Seneca, *De Clementia* |
| *Congr.* | Philo, *De congressu eruditionis gratia* |
| *De or.* | Cicero, *De oratore* |
| *Decal.* | Philo, *De decalogo* |
| *Deipn.* | Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* |
| *Diatr.* | Epictetus, *Diatribai (Dissertationes)* |
| *Disc.* | Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses* |
| *Ep.* | Pliny, *Epistulae* |
| *Ep.* | Seneca, *Epistulae morales* |
| *Eth. Nic.* | Aristotle, *Ethica nicomachea* |
| *Exil.* | Plutarch, *De exilio* |
| *Flacc.* | Philo, *In Flaccum* |
| *Gen. an.* | Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* |
| *Georg.* | Vergil, *Georgics* |
| *Hist.* | Tacitus, *Historiae* |
| *Hist.* | Sallust, *Historiae* |
| *Hist. eccl.* | Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* |
| *Ira* | Seneca, *De ira* |
| *J.W.* | Josephus, *Jewish War* |
| *Legat.* | Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium* |
| Let. Aris. | Letter of Aristeas |
| *Lex* | Hippocrates, *Lex* |
| *Lucil.* | Seneca, *Ad Lucilium* |
| *Metam.* | Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* |
| *Metam.* | Ovid, *Metamorphoses* |

| | |
|---|---|
| *Mor.* | Plutarch, *Moralia* |
| *Mos.* | Philo, *De vita Mosis* |
| *Mur.* | Cicero, *Pro Murena* |
| *Nat.* | Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis historia* |
| *Off.* | Cicero, *De Officiis* |
| *Onir.* | Artemidorus, *Onirocritica* |
| *Pan.* | Pliny the Younger, *Panegyricus* |
| *Pereg.* | Lucian, *De morte Peregrini* |
| *Phil.* | Cicero, *Orationes philippicae* |
| *Pol.* | Aristotle, *Politica* |
| *Pomp.* | Plutarch, *Pompeius* |
| *Prov. cons.* | Cicero, *De provinciis consularibus* |
| Quaest. Conv. | Plutarch, *Quaestiones Convivales* |
| *Rab.* | Cicero, *Pro Rabirio* |
| *Rhet.* | Aristotle, *Rhet.* |
| *Rom.* | Plutarch, *Romulus* |
| *Rust.* | Columella, *De re rustica* |
| *Rust.* | Varro, *De re rustica* |
| *Sat.* | Juvenal, *Satirae* |
| *Spec. Laws* | Philo, *On the Special Laws* |
| *Tib.* | Suetonius, *Tiberius* |
| *Tim.* | Plato, *Timaeus* |
| *Urb. Cond.* | Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* |
| *Verr.* | Cicero, *In Verrem* |
| *Vesp.* | Suetonius, *Vepasianus* |
| *Vita* | Josephus, *Vita* |
| *Vit. Apoll.* | Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* |
| *Vit. Phil.* | Diogenes, *Vitae Philosophorum* |

# *Contributors*

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# Foreword

# *"Come Eat of My Bread . . . and Walk in the Ways of Wisdom"*

*Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza*

*Harvard University Divinity School*

Jewish feminist writer Asphodel Long has likened the Bible to

> a magnificent garden of brilliant plants, some flowering, some fruiting, some in seed, some in bud, shaded by trees of age old, luxurious growth. Yet in the very soil which gives it life the poison has been inserted. . . . This poison is that of misogyny, the hatred of women, half the human race.[1]

To see Scripture as such a beautiful garden containing poisonous ivy requires that one identify and name this poison and place on all biblical texts the label "Caution! Could be dangerous to your health and survival!" As critical feminist interpretation for well-being this Wisdom Commentary seeks to elaborate the beauty and fecundity of this

1. Asphodel Long, *In a Chariot Drawn by Lions: The Search for the Female in the Deity* (London: Women's Press, 1992), 195.

Scripture-garden and at the same time points to the harm it can do when one submits to its world of vision. Thus, feminist biblical interpretation engages two seemingly contradictory insights: The Bible is written in kyriocentric (i.e., lord/master/father/husband-elite male) language, originated in the patri-kyriarchal cultures of antiquity, and has functioned to inculcate misogynist mind-sets and oppressive values. At the same time it also asserts that the Bible as Sacred Scripture has functioned to inspire and authorize wo/men[2] in our struggles against dehumanizing oppression. The hermeneutical lens of wisdom/Wisdom empowers the commentary writers to do so.

In biblical as well as in contemporary religious discourse the word *wisdom* has a double meaning: It can either refer to the quality of life and of people and/or it can refer to a figuration of the Divine. Wisdom in both senses of the word is not a prerogative of the biblical traditions but is found in the imagination and writings of all known religions. Wisdom is transcultural, international, and interreligious. Wisdom is practical knowledge gained through experience and daily living as well as through the study of creation and human nature. Both word meanings, that of capability (wisdom) and that of female personification (Wisdom), are crucial for this Wisdom Commentary series that seeks to enable biblical readers to become critical subjects of interpretation.

Wisdom is a state of the human mind and spirit characterized by deep understanding and profound insight. It is elaborated as a quality possessed by the sages but also treasured as folk wisdom and wit. Wisdom is the power of discernment, deeper understanding, and creativity; it is the ability to move and to dance, to make the connections, to savor life, and to learn from experience. Wisdom is intelligence shaped by experience and sharpened by critical analysis. It is the ability to make sound choices and incisive decisions. Its root meaning comes to the fore in its Latin form *sapientia*, which is derived from the verb *sapere*, to taste and to savor something. Hence, this series of commentaries invites readers to taste, to evaluate, and to imagine. In the figure of *Chokmah-Sophia-Sapientia-Wisdom*, ancient Jewish Scriptures seek to hold together belief in the "one" G*d[3] of Israel with both masculine and feminine language and metaphors of the Divine.

2. I use wo/man, s/he, fe/male and not the grammatical standard "man" as inclusive terms and make this visible by adding /.

3. I use the * asterisk in order to alert readers to a problem to explore and think about.

In distinction to traditional Scripture reading, which is often individualistic and privatized, the practice and space of Wisdom commentary is public. Wisdom's spiraling presence (*Shekhinah*) is global, embracing all creation. Her voice is a public, radical democratic voice rather than a "feminine," privatized one. To become one of Her justice-seeking friends, one needs to imagine the work of this feminist commentary series as the spiraling circle dance of wisdom/Wisdom,[4] as a Spirit/spiritual intellectual movement in the open space of wisdom/Wisdom who calls readers to critically analyze, debate, and reimagine biblical texts and their commentaries as wisdom/Wisdom texts inspired by visions of justice and well-being for everyone and everything. Wisdom-Sophia-imagination engenders a different understanding of Jesus and the movement around him. It understands him as the child and prophet of Divine Wisdom and as Wisdom herself instead of imagining him as ruling King and Lord who has only subalterns but not friends. To approach the N*T[5] and the whole Bible as Wisdom's invitation of cosmic dimensions means to acknowledge its multivalence and its openness to change. As bread—not stone.

In short, this commentary series is inspired by the feminist vision of the open cosmic house of Divine Wisdom-Sophia as it is found in biblical Wisdom literatures, which include the N*T:

> Wisdom has built Her house
> She has set up Her seven pillars . . .
> She has mixed Her wine,
> She also has set Her table.
> She has sent out Her wo/men ministers
> to call from the highest places in the town . . .
> "Come eat of my bread
> and drink of the wine I have mixed.
> Leave immaturity, and live,
> And walk in the way of Wisdom." (Prov 9:1-3, 5-6)

4. I have elaborated such a Wisdom dance in terms of biblical hermeneutics in my book *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001). Its seven steps are a hermeneutics of experience, of domination, of suspicion, of evaluation, of remembering or historical reconstruction, of imagination, and of transformation. However, such Wisdom strategies of meaning making are not restricted to the Bible. Rather, I have used them in workshops in Brazil and Ecuador to explore the workings of power, Condomblé, Christology, imagining a the*logical wo/men's center, or engaging the national icon of Mary.

5. See the discussion about nomenclature of the two testaments in the "Editor's Introduction to Wisdom Commentary," page xxxvii.

# Editor's Introduction to Wisdom Commentary

## *"She Is a Breath of the Power of God" (Wis 7:25)*

*Barbara E. Reid, OP*

*General Editor*

Wisdom Commentary is the first series to offer detailed feminist interpretation of every book of the Bible. The fruit of collaborative work by an ecumenical and interreligious team of scholars, the volumes provide serious, scholarly engagement with the whole biblical text, not only those texts that explicitly mention women. The series is intended for clergy, teachers, ministers, and all serious students of the Bible. Designed to be both accessible and informed by the various approaches of biblical scholarship, it pays particular attention to the world in front of the text, that is, how the text is heard and appropriated. At the same time, this series aims to be faithful to the ancient text and its earliest audiences; thus the volumes also explicate the worlds behind the text and within it. While issues of gender are primary in this project, the volumes also address the intersecting issues of power, authority, ethnicity, race, class, and religious belief and practice. The fifty-eight volumes include the books regarded as canonical by Jews (i.e., the Tanakh); Protestants (the "Hebrew Bible" and the New Testament); and Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Eastern

Orthodox Communions (i.e., Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach/Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, including the Letter of Jeremiah, the additions to Esther, and Susanna and Bel and the Dragon in Daniel).

## A Symphony of Diverse Voices

Included in the Wisdom Commentary series are voices from scholars of many different religious traditions, of diverse ages, differing sexual identities, and varying cultural, racial, ethnic, and social contexts. Some have been pioneers in feminist biblical interpretation; others are newer contributors from a younger generation. A further distinctive feature of this series is that each volume incorporates voices other than that of the lead author(s). These voices appear alongside the commentary of the lead author(s), in the grayscale inserts. At times, a contributor may offer an alternative interpretation or a critique of the position taken by the lead author(s). At other times, she or he may offer a complementary interpretation from a different cultural context or subject position. Occasionally, portions of previously published material bring in other views. The diverse voices are not intended to be contestants in a debate or a cacophony of discordant notes. The multiple voices reflect that there is no single definitive feminist interpretation of a text. In addition, they show the importance of subject position in the process of interpretation. In this regard, the Wisdom Commentary series takes inspiration from the Talmud and from *The Torah: A Women's Commentary* (ed. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Andrea L. Weiss; New York: Women of Reform Judaism, Federation of Temple Sisterhood, 2008), in which many voices, even conflicting ones, are included and not harmonized.

Contributors include biblical scholars, theologians, and readers of Scripture from outside the scholarly and religious guilds. At times, their comments pertain to a particular text. In some instances they address a theme or topic that arises from the text.

Another feature that highlights the collaborative nature of feminist biblical interpretation is that a number of the volumes have two lead authors who have worked in tandem from the inception of the project and whose voices interweave throughout the commentary.

## Woman Wisdom

The title, Wisdom Commentary, reflects both the importance to feminists of the figure of Woman Wisdom in the Scriptures and the distinct

wisdom that feminist women and men bring to the interpretive process. In the Scriptures, Woman Wisdom appears as "a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty" (Wis 7:25), who was present and active in fashioning all that exists (Prov 8:22-31; Wis 8:6). She is a spirit who pervades and penetrates all things (Wis 7:22-23), and she provides guidance and nourishment at her all-inclusive table (Prov 9:1-5). In both postexilic biblical and nonbiblical Jewish sources, Woman Wisdom is often equated with Torah, e.g., Sirach 24:23-34; Baruch 3:9–4:4; 38:2; 46:4-5; 2 Baruch 48:33, 36; 4 Ezra 5:9-10; 13:55; 14:40; 1 Enoch 42.

The New Testament frequently portrays Jesus as Wisdom incarnate. He invites his followers, "take my yoke upon you and learn from me" (Matt 11:29), just as Ben Sira advises, "put your neck under her [Wisdom's] yoke and let your souls receive instruction" (Sir 51:26). Just as Wisdom experiences rejection (Prov 1:23-25; Sir 15:7-8; Wis 10:3; Bar 3:12), so too does Jesus (Mark 8:31; John 1:10-11). Only some accept his invitation to his all-inclusive banquet (Matt 22:1-14; Luke 14:15-24; compare Prov 1:20-21; 9:3-5). Yet, "wisdom is vindicated by her deeds" (Matt 11:19, speaking of Jesus and John the Baptist; in the Lucan parallel at 7:35 they are called "wisdom's children"). There are numerous parallels between what is said of Wisdom and of the *Logos* in the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel (John 1:1-18). These are only a few of many examples. This female embodiment of divine presence and power is an apt image to guide the work of this series.

## Feminism

There are many different understandings of the term "feminism." The various meanings, aims, and methods have developed exponentially in recent decades. Feminism is a perspective and a movement that springs from a recognition of inequities toward women, and it advocates for changes in whatever structures prevent full human flourishing. Three waves of feminism in the United States are commonly recognized. The first, arising in the mid-nineteenth century and lasting into the early twentieth, was sparked by women's efforts to be involved in the public sphere and to win the right to vote. In the 1960s and 1970s, the second wave focused on civil rights and equality for women. With the third wave, from the 1980s forward, came global feminism and the emphasis on the contextual nature of interpretation. Now a fourth wave may be emerging, with a stronger emphasis on the intersectionality of women's concerns with those of other marginalized groups and the increased use

of the internet as a platform for discussion and activism.[1] As feminism has matured, it has recognized that inequities based on gender are interwoven with power imbalances based on race, class, ethnicity, religion, sexual identity, physical ability, and a host of other social markers.

## Feminist Women and Men

Men who choose to identify with and partner with feminist women in the work of deconstructing systems of domination and building structures of equality are rightly regarded as feminists. Some men readily identify with experiences of women who are discriminated against on the basis of sex/gender, having themselves had comparable experiences; others who may not have faced direct discrimination or stereotyping recognize that inequity and problematic characterization still occur, and they seek correction. This series is pleased to include feminist men both as lead authors and as contributing voices.

## Feminist Biblical Interpretation

Women interpreting the Bible from the lenses of their own experience is nothing new. Throughout the ages women have recounted the biblical stories, teaching them to their children and others, all the while interpreting them afresh for their time and circumstances.[2] Following is a very brief sketch of select foremothers who laid the groundwork for contemporary feminist biblical interpretation.

One of the earliest known Christian women who challenged patriarchal interpretations of Scripture was a consecrated virgin named Helie, who lived in the second century CE. When she refused to marry, her

1. See Martha Rampton, "Four Waves of Feminism" (October 25, 2015), at http://www.pacificu.edu/about-us/news-events/four-waves-feminism; and Ealasaid Munro, "Feminism: A Fourth Wave?," https://www.psa.ac.uk/insight-plus/feminism-fourth-wave.

2. For fuller treatments of this history, see chap. 7, "One Thousand Years of Feminist Bible Criticism," in Gerda Lerner, *Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 138–66; Susanne Scholz, "From the 'Woman's Bible' to the 'Women's Bible,' The History of Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible," in *Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible*, IFT 13 (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 12–32; Marion Ann Taylor and Agnes Choi, eds., *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters*: *A Historical and Biographical Guide* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012).

parents brought her before a judge, who quoted to her Paul's admonition, "It is better to marry than to be aflame with passion" (1 Cor 7:9). In response, Helie first acknowledges that this is what Scripture says, but then she retorts, "but not for everyone, that is, not for holy virgins."[3] She is one of the first to question the notion that a text has one meaning that is applicable in all situations.

A Jewish woman who also lived in the second century CE, Beruriah, is said to have had "profound knowledge of biblical exegesis and outstanding intelligence."[4] One story preserved in the Talmud (b. Ber. 10a) tells of how she challenged her husband, Rabbi Meir, when he prayed for the destruction of a sinner. Proffering an alternate interpretation, she argued that Psalm 104:35 advocated praying for the destruction of sin, not the sinner.

In medieval times the first written commentaries on Scripture from a critical feminist point of view emerge. While others may have been produced and passed on orally, they are for the most part lost to us now. Among the earliest preserved feminist writings are those of Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), German writer, mystic, and abbess of a Benedictine monastery. She reinterpreted the Genesis narratives in a way that presented women and men as complementary and interdependent. She frequently wrote about feminine aspects of the Divine.[5] Along with other women mystics of the time, such as Julian of Norwich (1342–ca. 1416), she spoke authoritatively from her personal experiences of God's revelation in prayer.

In this era, women were also among the scribes who copied biblical manuscripts. Notable among them is Paula Dei Mansi of Verona, from a distinguished family of Jewish scribes. In 1288, she translated from Hebrew into Italian a collection of Bible commentaries written by her father and added her own explanations.[6]

Another pioneer, Christine de Pizan (1365–ca. 1430), was a French court writer and prolific poet. She used allegory and common sense

3. Madrid, Escorial MS, a II 9, f. 90 v., as cited in Lerner, *Feminist Consciousness*, 140.

4. See Judith R. Baskin, "Women and Post-Biblical Commentary," in *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*, ed. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Andrea L. Weiss (New York: Women of Reform Judaism, Federation of Temple Sisterhood, 2008), xlix–lv, at lii.

5. Hildegard of Bingen, *De Operatione Dei*, 1.4.100; PL 197:885bc, as cited in Lerner, *Feminist Consciousness*, 142–43. See also Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

6. Emily Taitz, Sondra Henry, Cheryl Tallan, eds., *JPS Guide to Jewish Women 600 B.C.E.–1900 C.E.* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 2003), 110–11.

to subvert misogynist readings of Scripture and celebrated the accomplishments of female biblical figures to argue for women's active roles in building society.[7]

By the seventeenth century, there were women who asserted that the biblical text needs to be understood and interpreted in its historical context. For example, Rachel Speght (1597–ca. 1630), a Calvinist English poet, elaborates on the historical situation in first-century Corinth that prompted Paul to say, "It is well for a man not to touch a woman" (1 Cor 7:1). Her aim was to show that the biblical texts should not be applied in a literal fashion to all times and circumstances. Similarly, Margaret Fell (1614–1702), one of the founders of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, addressed the Pauline prohibitions against women speaking in church by insisting that they do not have universal validity. Rather, they need to be understood in their historical context, as addressed to a local church in particular time-bound circumstances.[8]

Along with analyzing the historical context of the biblical writings, women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries began to attend to misogynistic interpretations based on faulty translations. One of the first to do so was British feminist Mary Astell (1666–1731).[9] In the United States, the Grimké sisters, Sarah (1792–1873) and Angelina (1805–1879), Quaker women from a slaveholding family in South Carolina, learned biblical Greek and Hebrew so that they could interpret the Bible for themselves. They were prompted to do so after men sought to silence them from speaking out against slavery and for women's rights by claiming that the Bible (e.g., 1 Cor 14:34) prevented women from speaking in public.[10] Another prominent abolitionist, Sojourner Truth (ca. 1797–1883), a former slave, quoted the Bible liberally in her speeches[11] and in so doing challenged cultural assumptions and biblical interpretations that undergird gender inequities.

7. See further Taylor and Choi, *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters*, 127–32.

8. Her major work, *Women's Speaking Justified, Proved and Allowed by the Scriptures*, published in London in 1667, gave a systematic feminist reading of all biblical texts pertaining to women.

9. Mary Astell, *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (New York: Source Book Press, 1970, reprint of the 1730 edition; earliest edition of this work is 1700), 103–4.

10. See further Sarah Grimké, *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Woman* (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1838).

11. See, for example, her most famous speech, "Ain't I a Woman?," delivered in 1851 at the Ohio Women's Rights Convention in Akron, OH; http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/sojtruth-woman.asp.

Another monumental work that emerged in nineteenth-century England was that of Jewish theologian Grace Aguilar (1816–1847), *The Women of Israel*,[12] published in 1845. Aguilar's approach was to make connections between the biblical women and contemporary Jewish women's concerns. She aimed to counter the widespread notion that women were degraded in Jewish law and that only in Christianity were women's dignity and value upheld. Her intent was to help Jewish women find strength and encouragement by seeing the evidence of God's compassionate love in the history of every woman in the Bible. While not a full commentary on the Bible, Aguilar's work stands out for its comprehensive treatment of every female biblical character, including even the most obscure references.[13]

The first person to produce a full-blown feminist commentary on the Bible was Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902). A leading proponent in the United States for women's right to vote, she found that whenever women tried to make inroads into politics, education, or the work world, the Bible was quoted against them. Along with a team of like-minded women, she produced her own commentary on every text of the Bible that concerned women. Her pioneering two-volume project, *The Woman's Bible*, published in 1895 and 1898, urges women to recognize that texts that degrade women come from the men who wrote the texts, not from God, and to use their common sense to rethink what has been presented to them as sacred.

Nearly a century later, *The Women's Bible Commentary*, edited by Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), appeared. This one-volume commentary features North American feminist scholarship on each book of the Protestant canon. Like Cady Stanton's commentary, it does not contain comments on every section of the biblical text but only on those passages deemed relevant to women. It was revised and expanded in 1998 to include the Apocrypha/Deuterocanonical books, and the contributors to this new volume reflect the global face of contemporary feminist scholarship. The revisions made in the third edition, which appeared in 2012, represent the profound advances in feminist biblical scholarship and include newer voices. In both the second and third editions, *The* has been dropped from the title.

12. The full title is *The Women of Israel or Characters and Sketches from the Holy Scriptures and Jewish History Illustrative of the Past History, Present Duty, and Future Destiny of the Hebrew Females, as Based on the Word of God.*

13. See further Eskenazi and Weiss, *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*, xxxviii; Taylor and Choi, *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters*, 31–37.

Also appearing at the centennial of Cady Stanton's *The Woman's Bible* were two volumes edited by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza with the assistance of Shelly Matthews. The first, *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Introduction* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), charts a comprehensive approach to feminist interpretation from ecumenical, interreligious, and multicultural perspectives. The second volume, published in 1994, provides critical feminist commentary on each book of the New Testament as well as on three books of Jewish Pseudepigrapha and eleven other early Christian writings.

In Europe, similar endeavors have been undertaken, such as the one-volume *Kompendium Feministische Bibelauslegung*, edited by Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007), featuring German feminist biblical interpretation of each book of the Bible, along with apocryphal books, and several extrabiblical writings. This work, now in its third edition, has recently been translated into English.[14] A multivolume project, *The Bible and Women: An Encylopaedia of Exegesis and Cultural History*, edited by Irmtraud Fischer, Adriana Valerio, Mercedes Navarro Puerto, and Christiana de Groot, is currently in production. This project presents a history of the reception of the Bible as embedded in Western cultural history and focuses particularly on gender-relevant biblical themes, biblical female characters, and women recipients of the Bible. The volumes are published in English, Spanish, Italian, and German.[15]

Another groundbreaking work is the collection The Feminist Companion to the Bible Series, edited by Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993–2015), which comprises twenty volumes of commentaries on the Old Testament. The parallel series, Feminist Companion

14. *Feminist Biblical Interpretation: A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature*, trans. Lisa E. Dahill, Everett R. Kalin, Nancy Lukens, Linda M. Maloney, Barbara Rumscheidt, Martin Rumscheidt, and Tina Steiner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012). Another notable collection is the three volumes edited by Susanne Scholz, *Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Retrospect*, Recent Research in Biblical Studies 7, 8, 9 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013, 2014, 2016).

15. The first volume, on the Torah, appeared in Spanish in 2009, in German and Italian in 2010, and in English in 2011 (Atlanta: SBL Press). Five more volumes are now available: *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (2014); *The Writings and Later Wisdom Books*, ed. Christl M. Maier and Nuria Calduch-Benages (2014); *Gospels: Narrative and History*, ed. Mercedes Navarro Puerto and Marinella Perroni; English translation ed. Amy-Jill Levine (2015); *The High Middle Ages*, ed. Kari Elisabeth Børresen and Adriana Valerio (2015); and *Early Jewish Writings*, ed. Eileen Schuller and Marie-Theres Wacker (2017). For further information, see http://www.bibleandwomen.org.

to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings, edited by Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff and Maria Mayo Robbins (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001–2009), contains thirteen volumes with one more planned. These two series are not full commentaries on the biblical books but comprise collected essays on discrete biblical texts.

Works by individual feminist biblical scholars in all parts of the world abound, and they are now too numerous to list in this introduction. Feminist biblical interpretation has reached a level of maturity that now makes possible a commentary series on every book of the Bible. In recent decades, women have had greater access to formal theological education, have been able to learn critical analytical tools, have put their own interpretations into writing, and have developed new methods of biblical interpretation. Until recent decades the work of feminist biblical interpreters was largely unknown, both to other women and to their brothers in the synagogue, church, and academy. Feminists now have taken their place in the professional world of biblical scholars, where they build on the work of their foremothers and connect with one another across the globe in ways not previously possible. In a few short decades, feminist biblical criticism has become an integral part of the academy.

## Methodologies

Feminist biblical scholars use a variety of methods and often employ a number of them together.[16] In the Wisdom Commentary series, the authors will explain their understanding of feminism and the feminist reading strategies used in their commentary. Each volume treats the biblical text in blocks of material, not an analysis verse by verse. The entire text is considered, not only those passages that feature female characters or that speak specifically about women. When women are not apparent in the narrative, feminist lenses are used to analyze the dynamics in the text between male characters, the models of power, binary ways of thinking, and the dynamics of imperialism. Attention is given to how the whole text functions and how it was and is heard, both in its original context and today. Issues of particular concern to women—e.g., poverty, food, health, the environment, water—come to the fore.

16. See the seventeen essays in Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner, eds., *Her Master's Tools? Feminist and Postcolonial Engagements of Historical-Critical Discourse* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), which show the complementarity of various approaches.

One of the approaches used by early feminists and still popular today is to lift up the overlooked and forgotten stories of women in the Bible. Studies of women in each of the Testaments have been done, and there are also studies on women in particular biblical books.[17] Feminists recognize that the examples of biblical characters can be both empowering and problematic. The point of the feminist enterprise is not to serve as an apologetic for women; it is rather, in part, to recover women's history and literary roles in all their complexity and to learn from that recovery.

Retrieving the submerged history of biblical women is a crucial step for constructing the story of the past so as to lead to liberative possibilities for the present and future. There are, however, some pitfalls to this approach. Sometimes depictions of biblical women have been naïve and romantic. Some commentators exalt the virtues of both biblical and contemporary women and paint women as superior to men. Such reverse discrimination inhibits movement toward equality for all. In addition, some feminists challenge the idea that one can "pluck positive images out of an admittedly androcentric text, separating literary characterizations from the androcentric interests they were created to serve."[18] Still other feminists find these images to have enormous value.

One other danger with seeking the submerged history of women is the tendency for Christian feminists to paint Jesus and even Paul as liberators of women in a way that demonizes Judaism.[19] Wisdom Commentary aims to enhance understanding of Jesus as well as Paul as Jews of their day and to forge solidarity among Jewish and Christian feminists.

17. See, e.g., Alice Bach, ed., *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002); Carol Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross S. Kraemer, *Women in Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); Irene Nowell, *Women in the Old Testament* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997); Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Just Wives? Stories of Power and Survival in the Old Testament and Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003); Mary Ann Getty-Sullivan, *Women in the New Testament* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001); Bonnie Thurston, *Women in the New Testament: Questions and Commentary*, Companions to the New Testament (New York: Crossroad, 1998).

18. Cheryl Exum, "Second Thoughts about Secondary Characters: Women in Exodus 1.8–2.10," in *A Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy*, FCB 6, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 75–97, at 76.

19. See Judith Plaskow, "Anti-Judaism in Feminist Christian Interpretation," in *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Introduction*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 1:117–29; Amy-Jill Levine, "The New Testament and Anti-Judaism," in *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 87–117.

Feminist scholars who use historical-critical methods analyze the world behind the text; they seek to understand the historical context from which the text emerged and the circumstances of the communities to whom it was addressed. In bringing feminist lenses to this approach, the aim is not to impose modern expectations on ancient cultures but to unmask the ways that ideologically problematic mind-sets that produced the ancient texts are still promulgated through the text. Feminist biblical scholars aim not only to deconstruct but also to reclaim and reconstruct biblical history as women's history, in which women were central and active agents in creating religious heritage.[20] A further step is to construct meaning for contemporary women and men in a liberative movement toward transformation of social, political, economic, and religious structures.[21] In recent years, some feminists have embraced new historicism, which accents the creative role of the interpreter in any construction of history and exposes the power struggles to which the text witnesses.[22]

Literary critics analyze the world of the text: its form, language patterns, and rhetorical function.[23] They do not attempt to separate layers of tradition and redaction but focus on the text holistically, as it is in

20. See, for example, Phyllis A. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983); Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo, eds., *Women and Christian Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

21. See, e.g., Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), whose aim is to engage in biblical interpretation not only for intellectual enlightenment but, even more important, for personal and communal transformation. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (*Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001]) envisions the work of feminist biblical interpretation as a dance of Wisdom that consists of seven steps that interweave in spiral movements toward liberation, the final one being transformative action for change.

22. See Gina Hens-Piazza, *The New Historicism*, GBS, Old Testament Series (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002).

23. Phyllis Trible was among the first to employ this method with texts from Genesis and Ruth in her groundbreaking book *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, OBT (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978). Another pioneer in feminist literary criticism is Mieke Bal (*Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987]). For surveys of recent developments in literary methods, see Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore, eds., *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008).

its present form. They examine how meaning is created in the interaction between the text and its reader in multiple contexts. Within the arena of literary approaches are reader-oriented approaches, narrative, rhetorical, structuralist, post-structuralist, deconstructive, ideological, autobiographical, and performance criticism.[24] Narrative critics study the interrelation among author, text, and audience through investigation of settings, both spatial and temporal; characters; plot; and narrative techniques (e.g., irony, parody, intertextual allusions). Reader-response critics attend to the impact that the text has on the reader or hearer. They recognize that when a text is detrimental toward women there is the choice either to affirm the text or to read against the grain toward a liberative end. Rhetorical criticism analyzes the style of argumentation and attends to how the author is attempting to shape the thinking or actions of the hearer. Structuralist critics analyze the complex patterns of binary oppositions in the text to derive its meaning.[25] Post-structuralist approaches challenge the notion that there are fixed meanings to any biblical text or that there is one universal truth. They engage in close readings of the text and often engage in intertextual analysis.[26] Within this approach is deconstructionist criticism, which views the text as a site of conflict, with competing narratives. The interpreter aims to expose the fault lines and overturn and reconfigure binaries by elevating the underling of a pair and foregrounding it.[27] Feminists also use other postmodern approaches, such as ideological and autobiographical criticism. The former analyzes the system of ideas that underlies the power and

24. See, e.g., J. Cheryl Exum and David J. A. Clines, eds., *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1993); Edgar V. McKnight and Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, eds., *The New Literary Criticism and the New Testament* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994).

25. See, e.g., David Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative: Three Structural Analyses in the Old Testament*, JSOTSup 7 (Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1978).

26. See, e.g., Stephen D. Moore, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament: Derrida and Foucault at the Foot of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994); *The Bible in Theory: Critical and Postcritical Essays* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010); Yvonne Sherwood, *A Biblical Text and Its Afterlives: The Survival of Jonah in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

27. David Penchansky, "Deconstruction," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Steven McKenzie (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 196–205. See, for example, Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993); David Rutledge, *Reading Marginally: Feminism, Deconstruction and the Bible*, BibInt 21 (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

values concealed in the text as well as that of the interpreter.[28] The latter involves deliberate self-disclosure while reading the text as a critical exegete.[29] Performance criticism attends to how the text was passed on orally, usually in communal settings, and to the verbal and nonverbal interactions between the performer and the audience.[30]

From the beginning, feminists have understood that interpreting the Bible is an act of power. In recent decades, feminist biblical scholars have developed hermeneutical theories of the ethics and politics of biblical interpretation to challenge the claims to value neutrality of most academic biblical scholarship. Feminist biblical scholars have also turned their attention to how some biblical writings were shaped by the power of empire and how this still shapes readers' self-understandings today. They have developed hermeneutical approaches that reveal, critique, and evaluate the interactions depicted in the text against the context of empire, and they consider implications for contemporary contexts.[31] Feminists also analyze the dynamics of colonization and the mentalities of colonized peoples in the exercise of biblical interpretation. As Kwok Pui-lan explains, "A postcolonial feminist interpretation of the Bible needs to investigate the deployment of gender in the narration of identity, the negotiation of power differentials between the colonizers and the colonized, and the reinforcement of patriarchal control over spheres where these elites could exercise control."[32] Methods and models from sociology and cultural anthropology are used by feminists to investigate

28. See Tina Pippin, ed., *Ideological Criticism of Biblical Texts: Semeia* 59 (1992); Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 2007).

29. See, e.g., Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger, ed., *Autobiographical Biblical Interpretation: Between Text and Self* (Leiden: Deo, 2002); P. J. W. Schutte, "When *They*, *We*, and the Passive Become *I*—Introducing Autobiographical Biblical Criticism," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 61 (2005): 401–16.

30. See, e.g., Holly Hearon and Philip Ruge-Jones, eds., *The Bible in Ancient and Modern Media: Story and Performance* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009).

31. E.g., Gale Yee, ed., *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); Warren Carter, *The Gospel of Matthew in Its Roman Imperial Context* (London: T&T Clark, 2005); *The Roman Empire and the New Testament: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007); Judith E. McKinlay, *Reframing Her: Biblical Women in Postcolonial Focus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2004).

32. Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 9. See also, Musa W. Dube, ed., *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000); Cristl M. Maier and Carolyn J. Sharp,

women's everyday lives, their experiences of marriage, childrearing, labor, money, illness, etc.[33]

As feminists have examined the construction of gender from varying cultural perspectives, they have become ever more cognizant that the way gender roles are defined within differing cultures varies radically. As Mary Ann Tolbert observes, "Attempts to isolate some universal role that cross-culturally defines 'woman' have run into contradictory evidence at every turn."[34] Some women have coined new terms to highlight the particularities of their socio-cultural context. Many African American feminists, for example, call themselves *womanists* to draw attention to the double oppression of racism and sexism they experience.[35] Similarly, many US Hispanic feminists speak of themselves as *mujeristas* (*mujer* is Spanish for "woman").[36] Others prefer to be called "Latina feminists."[37] Both groups emphasize that the context for their theologizing is *mestizaje* and *mulatez* (racial and cultural mixture), done *en conjunto* (in community), with *lo cotidiano* (everyday lived experience) of Hispanic women as starting points for theological reflection and the encounter with the divine. Intercultural analysis has become an indispensable tool for working toward justice for women at the global level.[38]

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*Prophecy and Power: Jeremiah in Feminist and Postcolonial Perspective* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

33. See, for example, Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Luise Schottroff, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters: A Feminist Social History of Early Christianity*, trans. Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995); Susan Niditch, *"My Brother Esau Is a Hairy Man": Hair and Identity in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

34. Mary Ann Tolbert, "Social, Sociological, and Anthropological Methods," in *Searching the Scriptures*, 1:255–71, at 265.

35. Alice Walker coined the term (*In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1967, 1983]). See also Katie G. Cannon, "The Emergence of Black Feminist Consciousness," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 30–40; Renita Weems, *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible* (San Diego: Lura Media, 1988); Nyasha Junior, *An Introduction to Womanist Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015).

36. Ada María Isasi-Díaz (*Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996]) is credited with coining the term.

37. E.g., María Pilar Aquino, Daisy L. Machado, and Jeanette Rodríguez, eds., *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002).

38. See, e.g., María Pilar Aquino and María José Rosado-Nunes, eds., *Feminist Intercultural Theology: Latina Explorations for a Just World*, Studies in Latino/a Catholicism (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007).

Some feminists are among those who have developed lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) interpretation. This approach focuses on issues of sexual identity and uses various reading strategies. Some point out the ways in which categories that emerged in recent centuries are applied anachronistically to biblical texts to make modern-day judgments. Others show how the Bible is silent on contemporary issues about sexual identity. Still others examine same-sex relationships in the Bible by figures such as Ruth and Naomi or David and Jonathan. In recent years, queer theory has emerged; it emphasizes the blurriness of boundaries not just of sexual identity but also of gender roles. Queer critics often focus on texts in which figures transgress what is traditionally considered proper gender behavior.[39]

Feminists also recognize that the struggle for women's equality and dignity is intimately connected with the struggle for respect for Earth and for the whole of the cosmos. Ecofeminists interpret Scripture in ways that highlight the link between human domination of nature and male subjugation of women. They show how anthropocentric ways of interpreting the Bible have overlooked or dismissed Earth and Earth community. They invite readers to identify not only with human characters in the biblical narrative but also with other Earth creatures and domains of nature, especially those that are the object of injustice. Some use creative imagination to retrieve the interests of Earth implicit in the narrative and enable Earth to speak.[40]

## Biblical Authority

By the late nineteenth century, some feminists, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, began to question openly whether the Bible could continue to be regarded as authoritative for women. They viewed the Bible itself as the source of women's oppression, and some rejected its sacred origin

39. See, e.g., Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Women Partners in the New Testament," *JFSR* 6 (1990): 65–86; Deirdre J. Good, "Reading Strategies for Biblical Passages on Same-Sex Relations," *Theology and Sexuality* 7 (1997): 70–82; Deryn Guest, *When Deborah Met Jael: Lesbian Feminist Hermeneutics* (London: SCM, 2011); Teresa Hornsby and Ken Stone, eds., *Bible Trouble: Queer Readings at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011).

40. E.g., Norman C. Habel and Peter Trudinger, *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, SymS 46 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008); Mary Judith Ress, *Ecofeminism in Latin America*, Women from the Margins (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006).

and saving claims. Some decided that the Bible and the religious traditions that enshrine it are too thoroughly saturated with androcentrism and patriarchy to be redeemable.[41]

In the Wisdom Commentary series, questions such as these may be raised, but the aim of this series is not to lead readers to reject the authority of the biblical text. Rather, the aim is to promote better understanding of the contexts from which the text arose and of the rhetorical effects it has on women and men in contemporary contexts. Such understanding can lead to a deepening of faith, with the Bible serving as an aid to bring flourishing of life.

## Language for God

Because of the ways in which the term "God" has been used to symbolize the divine in predominantly male, patriarchal, and monarchical modes, feminists have designed new ways of speaking of the divine. Some have called attention to the inadequacy of the term *God* by trying to visually destabilize our ways of thinking and speaking of the divine. Rosemary Radford Ruether proposed *God/ess*, as an unpronounceable term pointing to the unnameable understanding of the divine that transcends patriarchal limitations.[42] Some have followed traditional Jewish practice, writing *G-d.* Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has adopted *G*d*.[43] Others draw on the biblical tradition to mine female and non-gender-specific metaphors and symbols.[44] In Wisdom Commentary, there is not one standard way of expressing the divine; each author will use her or his preferred ways. The one exception is that when the tetragrammaton, YHWH, the name revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:14, is used, it will be without vowels, respecting the Jewish custom of avoiding pronouncing the divine name out of reverence.

41. E.g., Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: A Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1973).

42. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon, 1983).

43. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet; Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 191 n. 3.

44. E.g., Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); Catherine LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991); Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992). See further Elizabeth A. Johnson, "God," in *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, 128–30.

## Nomenclature for the Two Testaments

In recent decades, some biblical scholars have begun to call the two Testaments of the Bible by names other than the traditional nomenclature: Old and New Testament. Some regard "Old" as derogatory, implying that it is no longer relevant or that it has been superseded. Consequently, terms like Hebrew Bible, First Testament, and Jewish Scriptures and, correspondingly, Christian Scriptures or Second Testament have come into use. There are a number of difficulties with these designations. The term "Hebrew Bible" does not take into account that parts of the Old Testament are written not in Hebrew but in Aramaic.[45] Moreover, for Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox believers, the Old Testament includes books written in Greek—the Deuterocanonical books, considered Apocrypha by Protestants.[46] The term "Jewish Scriptures" is inadequate because these books are also sacred to Christians. Conversely, "Christian Scriptures" is not an accurate designation for the New Testament, since the Old Testament is also part of the Christian Scriptures. Using "First and Second Testament" also has difficulties, in that it can imply a hierarchy and a value judgment.[47] Jews generally use the term Tanakh, an acronym for Torah (Pentateuch), Nevi'im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings).

In Wisdom Commentary, if authors choose to use a designation other than Tanakh, Old Testament, and New Testament, they will explain how they mean the term.

## Translation

Modern feminist scholars recognize the complexities connected with biblical translation, as they have delved into questions about philosophy of language, how meanings are produced, and how they are culturally situated. Today it is evident that simply translating into gender-neutral formulations cannot address all the challenges presented by androcentric texts. Efforts at feminist translation must also deal with issues around authority and canonicity.[48]

45. Gen 31:47; Jer 10:11; Ezra 4:7–6:18; 7:12-26; Dan 2:4–7:28.

46. Representing the *via media* between Catholic and reformed, Anglicans generally consider the Apocrypha to be profitable, if not canonical, and utilize select Wisdom texts liturgically.

47. See Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew*, 193–99.

48. Elizabeth Castelli, "*Les Belles Infidèles*/Fidelity or Feminism? The Meanings of Feminist Biblical Translation," in *Searching the Scriptures*, 1:189–204, here 190.

Because of these complexities, the editors of the Wisdom Commentary series have chosen to use an existing translation, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), which is provided for easy reference at the top of each page of commentary. The NRSV was produced by a team of ecumenical and interreligious scholars, is a fairly literal translation, and uses inclusive language for human beings. Brief discussions about problematic translations appear in the inserts labeled "Translation Matters." When more detailed discussions are available, these will be indicated in footnotes. In the commentary, wherever Hebrew or Greek words are used, English translation is provided. In cases where a wordplay is involved, transliteration is provided to enable understanding.

## Art and Poetry

Artistic expression in poetry, music, sculpture, painting, and various other modes is very important to feminist interpretation. Where possible, art and poetry are included in the print volumes of the series. In a number of instances, these are original works created for this project. Regrettably, copyright and production costs prohibit the inclusion of color photographs and other artistic work. It is our hope that the web version will allow a greater collection of such resources.

## Glossary

Because there are a number of excellent readily available resources that provide definitions and concise explanations of terms used in feminist theological and biblical studies, this series will not include a glossary. We refer you to works such as *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, edited by Letty M. Russell with J. Shannon Clarkson (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), and volume 1 of *Searching the Scriptures*, edited by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza with the assistance of Shelly Matthews (New York: Crossroad, 1992). Individual authors in the Wisdom Commentary series will define the way they are using terms that may be unfamiliar.

## Bibliography

Because bibliographies are quickly outdated and because the space is limited, only a list of Works Cited is included in the print volumes. A comprehensive bibliography for each volume is posted on a dedicated website and is updated regularly. The link for this volume can be found at wisdomcommentary.org.

## A Concluding Word

In just a few short decades, feminist biblical studies has grown exponentially, both in the methods that have been developed and in the number of scholars who have embraced it. We realize that this series is limited and will soon need to be revised and updated. It is our hope that Wisdom Commentary, by making the best of current feminist biblical scholarship available in an accessible format to ministers, preachers, teachers, scholars, and students, will aid all readers in their advancement toward God's vision of dignity, equality, and justice for all.

## Acknowledgments

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# Author's Introduction

## *A Feminist/Gender Reading of Mark's Gospel*

At heart, feminism focuses on redressing inequities that women experience in all spheres of life, and "it advocates for changes in whatever structures prevent full human flourishing."[1] In the introduction to another volume in this series, Mary Ann Beavis argues that feminist biblical interpretation presupposes and affirms women's full humanity and equality, recognizes and celebrates biblical passages and traditions that sustain these affirmations, and exposes and critiques biblical traditions and interpretations that marginalize and/or demean women and, in fact, any human beings.[2] Such a focus embraces a wide range of diverse interests, methods, and voices. Accordingly, there can never be only one or *the* feminist reading of Mark's Gospel; rather, there will and should be a rich variety of feminist readings of the Gospel.

In this introduction I identify constituent parts of the particular reading that I offer in this commentary. I locate myself as a male feminist (part 1); review previous feminist work on Mark (part 2); highlight areas of contribution that this commentary particularly makes, especially the use of the category of gender to embrace politically engaged feminist

1. Barbara Reid, "Editor's Introduction to Wisdom Commentary," above, xxiii.

2. Mary Ann Beavis and HyeRan Kim-Cragg, *Hebrews*, WCS 54 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), xliii.

and masculinity studies, including the significant concept of hegemonic masculinity (part 3); examine the use of notions of kyriarchy, or intersectionality (part 4); address the issue of the visibility of women and of women followers in the gospel (part 5); and conclude with a brief positioning of Mark's Gospel in its socio-political circumstances of origin in the structures of power of the Roman Empire (part 6).

## 1. A Male Feminist?

It might surprise some readers that I, a male, contribute this volume to a commentary series committed to detailed feminist interpretation of biblical writings. Given that feminist biblical work foregrounds the perspective of women's experiences, it would seem my task is impossible. Yet, as Barbara Reid, the general editor of the Wisdom Commentary series, observes, there are "men who choose to identify with and partner with feminist women in the work of deconstructing systems of domination and building structures of equality . . . [who] readily identify with experiences of women who are discriminated against on the basis of sex/gender, having themselves had comparable experiences . . . who . . . recognize that inequity and problematic characterization still occur, and they seek correction."[3] I take the invitation from an editorial board of twelve leading women scholars to contribute to this series as a welcome affirmation that I am an ally and partner in this struggle.

Across the years, I have learned from and allied with women from various cultures and ethnicities, with LGBTQ persons, with women in my own and other faith traditions, in various struggles—for ordination, for entry into the scholarly guild and finding voice and place in it, for equal employment opportunities and remuneration, for the rightful expression of sexual identities, in resistance to racial prejudice and to domestic violence, and in various other issues that contribute to the full flourishing of women and men. As many have recognized, there can be no release for the oppressed without release for the oppressor.

Reid notes the contribution of men who can identify with experiences of women who are discriminated against and who have had comparable experiences. I am an immigrant, having lived the first part of my life in a (post)colony of the defunct British Empire and the second half of my life in the United States. I present as a privileged heterosexual white

3. Reid, "Editor's Introduction," above, xxiv.

guy—until I open my mouth and strange sounds confound the listener. In all sorts of ways, immigrants know experiences of discrimination, marginalization, stereotyping, distrust, objectifying, condescension, disorientation, and dismissal. Like many immigrants, I know the daily experience of being culturally out of step, of being "othered," of being an oddity in various contexts.

I would not presume to suggest a direct correlation between my experiences and those that (some) women experience in different ways. I am suggesting, however, a fruitful affinity of comparable experiences involving marginalization, oppression, invisibilizing, and discrimination, all of which inform my reading of Mark's Gospel, which foregrounds matters of power and powerlessness. In addition to affinity and empathy, my voice committed to full flourishing for all humans does not exist in isolation. It is informed, as the subsequent commentary indicates, by numerous feminist interpreters as well as by a number of contributing voices.

## 2. Previous Feminist Work on Mark

A fine tradition of feminist scholarship on Mark's Gospel is well established and rich, especially in discussions of the ten sections involving women. Beyond attempting a reading of the whole Gospel and not only the passages involving women, what might this commentary contribute?

In a 2001 article,[4] Joanna Dewey begins a review of modern feminist studies of Mark with the 1976 volume titled *The Liberating Word*, to which Dewey contributed an essay on "positive images of women" in the New Testament, including discussion of two passages from Mark (3:31-35; 7:24-30).[5] Dewey affirms the book's "exciting and liberating" contribution but also identifies its limitations: its authorship ("Euro-American middle-class Christian women"), essentialist treatment of women (ignoring race and class), lack of methodological sophistication, reinforcing of Christian anti-Semitism, and focus on individual biblical passages to the neglect of the wider collection.

4. Joanna Dewey, "'Let Them Renounce Themselves and Take Up Their Cross': A Feminist Reading of Mark 8.34 in Mark's Social and Narrative World," in *A Feminist Companion to Mark*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff, FCNTECW 2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 23–36.

5. Letty Russell et al., eds., *The Liberating Word: A Guide to Nonsexist Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976).

Thereafter Dewey marks rapid progress in both "methodological sophistication and knowledge" of scholarship through the 1983 volume edited by Mary Ann Tolbert that focused on women as readers of androcentric texts[6] and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's groundbreaking *In Memory of Her.*[7] Schüssler Fiorenza revisioned early Christian history and theology in identifying women as both victims and agents. In discussing Mark, she stresses suffering discipleship, the critical presentation of the male disciples, and "the circle of women disciples [that] exemplifies true discipleship" comprising Mary of Magdala, Mary (the mother of Joses and James), and Salome who are found bravely at the cross (15:40, 47; 16:1). Described with the discipleship verbs of "following" and "ministering," these women are characterized as apostolic witnesses who "come up with him to Jerusalem" (15:41). Schüssler Fiorenza reads 16:8 positively in that the women made no public announcement but did proclaim to the specified (male) disciples and Peter.

The 1990s saw the emergence of numerous articles that discussed scenes in Mark's Gospel involving women, along with the publication of several monographs focused on women in the Gospel.[8] Also emerging were feminist biblical commentaries and anthologies such as *The Women's Bible Commentary*,[9] *Searching the Scriptures*,[10] and *Reading the Bible as Women.*[11] Mary Ann Tolbert contributes the twelve-page essay

6. Mary Ann Tolbert, ed., *The Bible and Feminist Hermeneutics*, *Semeia* 28 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1983).

7. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), on Mark, 316–23.

8. For example, Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad, 1988); Monika Fander, *Die Stellung der Frau im Markusevangelium. Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung kultur- und religionsgeschichtlicher Hintergründe*, Münsteraner Theologische Abhandlungen 8 (Altenberge: Telos, 1989); Hisako Kinukawa, *Women and Jesus in Mark: A Japanese Feminist Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994); Joan L. Mitchell, *Beyond Fear and Silence: A Feminist-Literary Reading of Mark* (London: Continuum, 2001).

9. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, eds., *The Women's Bible Commentary* (Philadelphia/Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992, 1998, 2012). The second and third editions dropped "The" from the title.

10. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., *Searching the Scriptures*, 2 vols. (New York: Crossroad, 1993, 1994).

11. Phyllis Bird, Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, and Sharon H. Ringe, eds., *Reading the Bible as Women: Perspectives from Africa, Asia, and Latin America*, *Semeia* 78 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997).

on Mark in *The Women's Bible Commentary.*[12] Her introductory comments affirm important roles for women in Mark's narrative, identify some historical and cultural factors influencing the Gospel's creation and reception, and discuss some of the literary techniques in the Gospel. Tolbert then discusses scenes involving women under four headings: women among the healed (1:29-34; 5:24b-43; 7:24-30); women as examples of faithful acts (12:41-44; 14:3-9); women depicted in negative light (3:20-35; 6:1-6; 6:14-29), and women in the passion narrative (14:66-72; 15:40–16:8). This thematic organization helpfully highlights diverse roles for women characters, but the approach tends to flatten out the characterization as types. It also leaves much of the Gospel undiscussed.

Joanna Dewey contributes the thirty-nine page article on Mark in volume 2 of *Searching the Scriptures.*[13] She seeks to "lay bare the androcentricism of the text" and "to bring out the liberating egalitarianism vision of the gospel." Whereas Tolbert focuses only on passages involving women, Dewey proceeds through the whole Gospel to offer both narrative and feminist analysis. This approach has the advantage of (briefly) engaging the whole Gospel, yet its two categories are treated separately and regrettably suggest that the "feminist analysis" is extraneous to narrative concerns. The task of a sustained feminist reading of the whole Gospel remains.

Dewey assesses these twenty-five years of feminist scholarship in mixed terms.[14] One positive contribution is that the women in the Gospel are no longer invisible. Another is the identification of positive images of women as Jesus' followers in the Gospel. Yet disturbing is her insightful recognition of the way in which the Gospel marginalizes, renders invisible, and presents women in a way that "tends to serve the interests and aims of males" requiring women to read as men. Dewey concludes: "In the last 25 years we have *both* rediscovered the women of the Bible and reconstructed their significant role in early Christian history, *and* learned how problematic for women the Bible is."[15]

The first decade of the 2000s expanded feminist work. In 2001 *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women* appeared with

12. Mary Ann Tolbert, "Mark," in Newsom and Ringe, eds., *The Women's Bible Commentary*, 350–62.

13. Dewey, "The Gospel of Mark," in Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., *Searching the Scriptures*, 2:470–509.

14. Dewey, "Let Them Renounce Themselves," 26–28.

15. Ibid., 27.

entries on named and unnamed women in the scriptural tradition.[16] Another important contribution was Amy-Jill Levine's edited volumes of essays that comprised the Feminist Companion to the Bible series. The Mark volume appeared in 2001.[17] Important articles on pericopes involving women have continued to be published, as have an increasing number of monographs.[18] These monographs have also expanded the voices in the conversation. While there were exceptions in previous scholarship, including Rita Nakashima Brock, Laura Donaldson, and Hisako Kinukawa, the feminist conversation on Mark has generally been dominated by white Euro-American women. More recent voices emerging in the decades of the twenty-first century have included African American (Raquel St. Clair),[19] Korean (Seong Hee Kim; Jin Young Choi),[20] Latin American (Elsa Tamez),[21] and African (Teresa Okure)[22] contributions, among others. These voices not only bring diverse ethnic perspectives from the global village but also add further methods to the feminist repertoire such as postcolonial and imperial-critical approaches. I have learned much from these studies, and, wherever possible, these studies inform my work here in order to render visible not only women in the text but also women reading the text.

As yet, however, there has been no monograph-length, sustained reading of the whole Gospel from a feminist perspective. What might such

16. Carol Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross Kraemer, eds., *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

17. Amy-Jill Levine, ed., with Marianne Blickenstaff, *A Feminist Companion to Mark*, FCNTECW 2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001).

18. For example, Susan Miller, *Women in Mark's Gospel*, JSNTSup 259 (London: T&T Clark, 2004); Sharon Betsworth, *The Reign of God Is Such as These: A Socio-Literary Analysis of Daughters in the Gospel of Mark*, LNTS 422 (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2010).

19. Raquel St. Clair, *Call and Consequence: A Womanist Reading of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008).

20. Seong Hee Kim, *Mark, Women and Empire: A Korean Postcolonial Perspective* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010); Jin Young Choi, *Postcolonial Discipleship of Embodiment: An Asian and Asian American Feminist Reading of the Gospel of Mark* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015).

21. Elsa Tamez, "The Conflict in Mark: A Reading from the Armed Conflict in Colombia," in *Mark*, ed. Nicole Wilkinson Duran, Teresa Okure, and Daniel Patte, Texts@Contexts (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 101–25.

22. Teresa Okure, "Children in Mark: A Lens for Reading Mark's Gospel," in Duran, Okure, and Patte, eds., *Mark*, 127–44.

a commentary entail? In an article from 2008, Janice Capel Anderson identifies four kinds of feminist work:[23]

1. recovering female images of God and concentrating on stories of women in the text in order to recover images of biblical women, images of agency, and images of victimization;
2. reconstruction of the historical and social background of the text with reference to the category of gender: rewriting the histories of Israel and the early church in a way that does justice to the roles of women as the subjects or makers of history as well as the objects of oppression;
3. recovering the history of women in interpreting the Bible and rewriting the history of interpretation;
4. examining readers' responses: asking how gender and other historical and social variables shape the production of meaning ("what difference does it make if the reader is a woman?").

Anderson's four categories center on women. The first category focuses on recovering women in the text, her second focuses on reconstructing roles of women in the world from which biblical texts emerge and embrace, and the third and fourth focus on women reading the biblical material in the past and present and recognize the significance of locations impacted by "various races, classes, religions, sexual affiliations, and times."[24] Attention to such questions would produce a rich discussion and certainly identify important aspects of this reading: recovery, reconstruction, and reading location.

Yet this exclusive "women-centered" approach, though rich with diverse optics, is also limited for engaging the whole gospel narrative—which is the assignment for this commentary. It is problematic in several ways. For starters, only ten pericopes in the Gospel explicitly give women characters some visibility, agency, and/or voice. What can be done with the remaining scenes in addition to noting the Gospel's relentless androcentricity through suppression of the presence of women

23. Janice Capel Anderson, "Feminist Criticism: The Dancing Daughter," in *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 111–43, esp. 117–20.

24. Anderson, "Feminist Criticism," 120.

as Jesus-followers and members of crowds and to restoring the presence of women followers and crowd members to visibility?

Dewey confronts this problem of the whole narrative by resorting to two tracks of feminist and narrative analyses of the text.[25] Yet the two tracks remain largely unrelated in her discussion. Monika Fander addresses the problem by attending to the contexts in which the sections involving women appear—predominantly narrative and theological contexts but also, cautiously, historical contexts.[26] While this approach serves Fander's short discussion of eighteen pages well in foregrounding the women scenes, it does so by relegating much of the Gospel to the narrative category of "context" without significant engagement and will not enable the mandate of this volume to engage the whole Gospel to be discussed. Hisako Kinukawa declares that she will focus "on the power relationships at work" in the Gospel.[27] Regrettably, though, given the crucial importance of this dynamic for the Gospel, for contemporary readers, and for this commentary, she discusses only three texts.

Another option might be to foreground not only the women characters in the narrative but the possible experiences and locations that women readers bring to the text and the insights and meaning that result. Yet while such interaction is necessary and exciting, it creates significant logistical challenges for a commentary since women in many different locations will produce many different readings, as the rich feminist scholarship on the ten passages featuring women characters in the Gospel attests.[28] I will draw on a considerable range of feminist scholarship wherever possible while recognizing that all readers will read in relation

25. Dewey, "The Gospel of Mark," 470–509.

26. Monika Fander, "Gospel of Mark: Women as True Disciples of Jesus," in *Feminist Biblical Interpretation: A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature*, ed. Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker, trans. Lisa E. Dahill, Everett R. Kalin, Nancy Lukens, Linda M. Maloney, Barbara Rumscheidt, Martin Rumscheidt, and Tina Steiner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 626–44.

27. Hisako Kinukawa, "Mark," in *Global Bible Commentary*, ed. Daniel Patte (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 367–78.

28. For example, Hisako Kinukawa ("Sexuality and Household: When 'Cultural Reading' Supersedes and Skews the Meaning of Texts," in Duran, Okure, and Patte, eds., *Mark*, 147–70, esp. 147) narrates an experience of teaching a class on "Feminist Hermeneutics of the Gospels," which included sixteen women from nine countries and from diverse household configurations (single, married/remarried, divorcing, divorced, lesbians, children, and no children), each with their own understandings and experiences of patriarchy.

to their own circumstances. I hope to contribute to such diverse meaning-making through the commentary.

Fundamentally, what is needed for this work is a feminist method capable of embracing a reading of the whole Gospel—including pericopes that involve both women and men. The approach I adopt here sets the focus on women in relation not only to the fine feminist work noted above but also to two further dimensions: masculinity studies under the category of gender studies and intersectionality or kyriarchy.

## 3. Gender Studies: The Inclusion of Masculinity with Feminist Studies?

Feminist work has long been concerned with structures of patriarchy and androcentricity, whether in textual form or in malestream scholarly and interpretive discussions about those texts. Yet much feminist work on Mark has largely bypassed attention to male characters and to the Gospel's constructions of masculinities. This omission is understandable as redress for the neglect of the presence and contributions of women in previous malestream scholarship.

Yet the neglect of masculinities performed in the Gospel narrative has serious implications. Presumably (some/most) men and their actions belong among what the guidelines for this commentary series identify as "issues about which women are concerned," such as male privilege and power, violence, and partnership.[29] More important, the omission leaves male presence and power in this Gospel narrative untroubled and normative. While retrieving women's presence and experience and examining the constructions of women's identities and interpretations remains very important, these approaches skirt the presence and constructions of male characters, power, and identities with which women readers and characters, experiences, and identities intersect, sometimes positively and often negatively. In so doing, the discussion can leave men's power and presence as "natural" or "normal" or "essential," even "divinely sanctioned," rather than recognizing and evaluating masculinity as constructed, performed, and sometimes dangerous. Given the frequently recognized cultural importance of the Bible for the contemporary world, critical attention to constructions of masculinities in the Gospel, including that of Jesus and of male followers, is a necessity. This is particularly

29. "Revised Guidelines for Contributors," Wisdom Commentary series, 4–5.

so when some readers (especially, though not exclusively, male readers) appeal uncritically to biblical writings to support male domination as divinely sanctioned. The Gospel's constructions of masculinity need identification, evaluation, and deconstruction in the pursuit of justice for all.

As I employ them here, gender studies, like feminist work, pursue a political vision of liberation from the tyranny of destructive norms, especially in the ways that masculinities are constructed.[30] The approach puts men in focus but as a problematized category and without removing attention from women and the often unequal power dynamics that mark interaction between men and women. And it allows attention to "sites of disruption" in which norms of masculinity are unseated.[31] Accordingly, "a feminist lens should also be brought to the dynamics going on in the text between male characters, by critiquing male models of power, as well as binary ways of thinking, and dynamics of imperialism."[32] In this approach, *gender* refers "to the performative aspect of being a 'man' or a 'woman,' the cultural role models one adopts to act as one or the other." *Sex* refers to "the physical aspects of being identified as 'male' or 'female.'" That is, with Foucault, sex and gender are not "fixed, natural categories [but] shaped by particular social and cultural practices."[33] They are critical elements of social and cultural worlds in antiquity and are employed in texts like Mark, and interpretations of it, to bolster argumentation and build images.[34]

It is not surprising, as Stephen Moore observes, that the "interface between feminist and masculinity studies is [not] a friction-free zone," especially given the emergence of more populist "men's studies" and "the men's movement" as a backlash against a feminist agenda.[35] Eve Sedgwick, for example, protests rightly any gender discourse comprising "women's studies plus . . . men's studies" when the discourse is con-

30. Deryn Guest, *Beyond Feminist Biblical Studies* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012), 22.

31. Ibid., 20, 40.

32. "Revised Guidelines for Contributors," Wisdom Commentary series, 5.

33. Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner, *Contextualizing Gender in Early Christian Discourse: Thinking Beyond Thecla* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 4, 20. They also define "sexuality" as that which "refers to one's sexual orientation . . . heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual" (4).

34. Ibid., 36.

35. Stephen D. Moore, "'O Man, Who Art Thou . . . ?' Masculinity Studies and New Testament Studies," in *New Testament Masculinities*, ed. Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel Anderson, SemeiaSt 45 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 1–22, esp. 3–4; Guest, *Beyond Feminist Biblical Studies*.

ceived as the joining of "separate but equal" entities. This construction of the intersection of two disciplines represses "the oppression historically exercised by one over the other." Sedgwick continues, "Things get even worse when the rationale for an additive gender studies agenda involves not a nominally depoliticized and positivist study of women as women and men as men but rather the conscious promotion of masculinist viewpoints . . . as a remedial 'balance' against feminist ones."[36] Rightly, the power of hegemonic masculinity[37] among scholars and in scholarly work cannot be underestimated. Elaine Wainwright accordingly urges feminist interpretation of Matthew's Gospel to "extend its gender focus to include male gendering" but wisely cautions that "the power of the normativity of masculinity in both texts and the consciousness of interpreters remains strong."[38]

Such concerns are well founded and as much as possible I heed them. To repeat, my attention to constructions of masculinities in this reading of Mark's Gospel is politically engaged, problematized, and shaped by awareness of the often destructive cultural impact of the Bible when constructions of masculinities are not engaged. My goal is to expose and evaluate constructions of masculinities in Mark's Gospel and their (often problematic) formulations while also attending to the constructions, presence, and absence of women characters.

In relation to the methods that masculinity approaches employ, Stephen Moore notes that there seems to be an "emergence of a more unified methodological front in the study of early Christian masculinities."[39] This unified methodology investigates New Testament constructions of masculinity by probing "similarities to and differences from other constructions of masculinity in Mediterranean culture(s)."[40] Investigations from classics and expanding work on "Greek and Roman masculinities" have become central, though with the recognition (not explicitly made by Moore) that most surviving sources attest elite constructions of masculinity, making access to nonelite masculinities very difficult.

36. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Gender Criticism," in *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1992), 271–302, esp. 272, cited in Moore, "O Man," 3.

37. See the discussion below.

38. Elaine Wainwright, "Feminist Criticism and the Gospel of Matthew," in *Methods for Matthew*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 83–117, esp. 95.

39. Moore, "O Man," 17.

40. Ibid., 20.

So, for example, Tat-siong Benny Liew's analysis of "Re-Mark-able Masculinities" engages ancient Mediterranean masculinities as the world in which Mark's narrative participates. Liew argues that rather than masculinity being a stable and settled construct, competing and provisional masculinities existed simultaneously.[41] So he observes (elite?) masculinities to comprise, variously, moral excellence (*vir* and *virtus*), military courage and domination (including rhetorical domination), success in public competition, agricultural provider, procreator, sexual aggressor and penetrator, head of a household (*paterfamilias*), self-mastery and internal direction, self-sacrifice, arts of peace, and embracing pain and death. In the context of social contest, Liew notes contrasting "others" to men: a "womanly male" who fails to perform these masculine practices, women, foreigners, social inferiors. He argues that Mark presents Jesus as "an all-Mediterranean male" who exercises mastery of others and self-mastery, yet, finally, the Gospel's portrayal is contradictory in that Jesus is mastered and destroyed by his (patriarchal) God-Father who requires Jesus' martyr's death even though Jesus does not fully understand the how or why.[42] Jesus is both an agent and a victim of patriarchal gender norms, a perpetrator of them yet one who is destroyed by them.

Liew's analysis helpfully highlights several dimensions of approaches to masculinity. Drawing on David Gilmore and Judith Butler, he emphasizes that masculinity is achieved, accomplished, won, kept, performed.[43] His attention to expressions of Mediterranean masculinities highlights not only the context in which it is constructed and participates but also how unstable and contested masculinities were. But perhaps most compellingly and helpfully, Liew insists that one cannot discuss masculinities and Mark without critically engaging patriarchy, which "chews up both women and men in its machinery just the same"[44]—though I suspect that "just the same" is an overstatement and that there is plenty of evidence

41. Tat-siong Benny Liew, "Re-Mark-Able Masculinities: Jesus, the Son of Man, and the (Sad) Sum of Manhood," in Moore, ed., *New Testament Masculinities*, 93–135, esp. 109–10. Space precludes discussion of the excellent essay by Eric Thurman, "Looking for a Few Good Men: Mark and Masculinity," in Moore, ed., *New Testament Masculinities*, 137–61.

42. Liew, "Re-Mark-Able Masculinities," 124–35.

43. Liew, "Re-Mark-Able Masculinities," 93, 96, 112. David Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Conceptions of Masculinity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); David Gilmore, "Anthropology of the Mediterranean Area," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 11 (1982): 175–200; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

44. Liew, "Re-Mark-Able Masculinities," 134–35.

to sustain the claim that women are more detrimentally impacted than men who often know a "patriarchal dividend."

Yet while Liew attends to notions of "Mediterranean masculinities" and patriarchy across a thousand-year span,[45] the analysis of Mark lacks sharp engagement with masculinities particularly performed in relation to the assertion of Roman imperial power in 69 and 70 CE with the emergence of Vespasian as emperor after the civil war of 68 to 69 and in his son Titus's destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. These victories of military masculinity and domination were celebrated in the Flavian triumph or victory parade in Rome in 71 CE. If Mark's Gospel was written in Rome around this time (a possibility I suggest below), it was written in a context where such masculinity was performed and celebrated and where its dividend of power both benefitted many and enslaved and/or destroyed the conquered, foreign, provincial "unmen."

Similar attention to masculinities in the Roman imperial period informs Colleen Conway's monograph-length study of New Testament presentations of Jesus.[46] She begins by theorizing masculinity in drawing on Michel Foucault's and Judith Butler's notions of gender as performance: "Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow: rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts."[47]

Conway employs the central notion of hegemonic masculinity, a notion of power that denotes a "particular variety of masculinity to which others . . . are subordinated" and in which "very large numbers of men are complicit in sustaining the hegemonic model."[48] That is, while only a small group of men may enact this dominant ideology, numerous others, men and women, support it and benefit from "the patriarchal dividend." Conway finds this notion helpful for understanding the Greco-Roman world in that, while data on masculinities originate mostly from and reflect elite culture, the "notion of hegemony . . . is nevertheless supported in multiple ways by other, much larger groups"[49] (see further below).

45. Ibid., 94 n. 3.

46. Colleen Conway, *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

47. Ibid., 9, quoting Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 140.

48. Conway, *Behold the Man*, 9–10, quoting Tim Carrigan, Bob Connell, and John Lee, "Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity," in *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies*, ed. Harry Brod (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 86, 92. See also Robert W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

49. Conway, *Behold the Man*, 10.

Thereafter Conway's excellent discussion engages "how to be a man in the Greco-Roman world."[50] She observes that "one was ontologically a male but existentially a man" in that masculinity was not a matter of genitalia but social performance.[51] The male body could not guarantee masculinity since there was understood to be "one sex." The reproductive organs of the perfect and complete male were turned outward; those of imperfect and incomplete female were turned inward. "Male" is the only category; "female" is a noncategory since a female was, according to Philo, "nothing else than an imperfect male."[52] The negative consequences of this "one sex" construction for women in terms of invisibility and discounting is clear. For elite men, the problem comprised the risk of "a slide into effeminacy," the risk of being not a "manly man" but a "womanly man" if one did not perform masculinity with one's body or if one was penetrated or beaten ("unmen").[53] Performing masculinity included "the active role in sexual practice and in public life" along with self-control, especially restraint of one's passions and "dominion over another";[54] practicing virtue (self-control, wisdom, justice, courage), including self-mastery of "anger, lust, avarice and excess"; practicing courage in battle and death; and bearing pain.[55] Craig Williams observes: "In short, the oppositional pair masculine/effeminate can be aligned with a set of others: moderation/excess; hardness/softness; courage/timidity; strength/weakness; activity/passivity; sexually penetrating/being sexually penetrated; and in encompassing all these, domination/submission."[56]

50. Ibid., 15–34; in a subsequent chapter ("Constructing the Lives of Divine Men," 35–66) she examines "three manly figures"—Augustus, Philo's Moses, and Philostratus's Apollonius of Tyana—to observe "diverse ways that masculine ideology finds expression" (65), a link between gendered construction and divinity, and a mix of assimilation to Greco-Roman ideals with some resistance to imperial rule.

51. Ibid., 17.

52. Ibid., 17.

53. Ibid., 17–18. Physiognomic approaches understood body features to provide corporeal clues to "unmask a person's real gender identity" (19–20).

54. Ibid., 22. Conway quotes Craig A. Williams (*Roman Homosexuality*, 2nd ed. [New York: Oxford University Press, 2010], 155), "A man must exercise dominion over his own body and his own desires as well as the bodies and desires of those under his jurisdiction—his wife, children, and slaves—just as the Roman citizenry as a whole ideally dominates most of the rest of the world."

55. Conway, *Behold the Man*, 23–29.

56. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, 156.

In the light of this discussion, Conway explores the construction of the masculinity of Mark's Jesus.[57] She finds Mark's Jesus to be in part "an ideal man . . . the strong-man Jesus who resists both Satan and those representing Roman authority [and who] teaches this impending death in terms of a noble martyr's death." Yet in the end, instead of a noble death, the Gospel "presents Jesus as crying out in anguish, exposed and vulnerable," as the cultural ideology of hegemonic masculinity is exposed by deadly Roman force. She entertains Eric Thurman's argument that this "ambivalent portrayal of masculinity in Mark is a result of colonized subjectivity."[58] And she allows that there may be some resistance in this cruciform exposure and in the empty tomb. Yet the narrative emphasis throughout the passion falls on the hegemonic demands of following "the will of the father."[59]

While Liew emphasizes the importance of patriarchy, Conway emphasizes hegemonic masculinity as the central category. Along with Thurman, they underscore the importance of the Roman imperial world in shaping masculinities. These are important emphases crucial for engaging Mark's Gospel in this commentary.

Given the importance of R. W. Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity for the following discussion, it will be useful to outline several features of the analysis of the dynamics of complex hierarchical gender relations:[60]

- Male Dominance: This notion expresses the cultural practices of masculinity by which powerful men exercise dominance in the Gospel and that reflects and inscribes the worlds from which it

57. Conway, *Behold the Man*, 89–106.

58. Ibid., 105; Eric Thurman, "Looking for a Few Good Men: Mark and Masculinity," 137–61.

59. Conway, *Behold the Man*, 104–6.

60. R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 76–81; for evaluation and recognition of greater theoretical complexity, agency of subordinated groups, the social conditioning of gender dynamics, the geography of masculinities (local, regional, global), masculine embodiment as both object and subject, and internal contradictions (with extensive bibliography), R. W. Connell and James Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender & Society* 19 (2005): 829–59. For critique, Demetrakis Demetriou, "Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique," *Theory & Society* 30 (2001): 337–61, including the argument that hegemonic masculinities unite practices from diverse masculinities to reproduce patriarchy; Jeff Hearn, "From Hegemonic Masculinity to the Hegemony of Men," *Feminist Theory* 5 (2004): 49–72, foregrounding men as formed by and agents of social gender practices.

originates. That is, hegemonic masculinity must be performed in socio-political actions, faces competition, and must be repeatedly demonstrated.[61]

- Subordination: The dominance of particular men means the subordination of most women (although some powerful and dominating women appropriate aspects of hegemonic masculinity)[62] as well as of most men who are less powerful in the gender hierarchies (nonhegemonic masculinities).
- Complicity: While only a few men can live up to and compete for the ideal domination of hegemonic masculinity, most men, including those who are submissive, "benefit from the patriarchal dividend"[63] because the larger cultural pattern subordinates women. That is, men who do not embody or compete for hegemonic masculinity are, nevertheless, complicit in its benefits.
- Marginalization: Often subordinated men, especially those who espouse a masculinity or sexuality that differs greatly from the cultural norm, are marginalized, commonly linked by some to expressions of femininity.

In Connell's terms, Mark's Jesus, though socially, culturally, and politically a nonelite, provincial, and subjugated male, exercises for much of Mark's narrative, though not all of it since he is crucified at the will of the alliance of ruling elites, supreme power in the narrative world over other men (including elites), women, children, disease, nature, the devil, and demons. Throughout, he also undergoes a challenge from competing males and experiences, and in his death, apparent defeat at their hands.

Yet the challenge of linking explorations of masculinities with feminist concerns must not be underestimated. Hegemonic masculinities in their various forms and by their assertions of power can dominate and obscure or negate feminist concerns, thereby maintaining an unjust status quo of male dominance. And "added-on" men's studies (Sedgwick) similarly mask unjust dynamics that need to be exposed and dismantled.

Crucial to my discussion here is the understanding that both feminist and masculinity studies function as "destabilizing forces . . . in their

61. Butler, *Gender Trouble*.
62. Connell and Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity," 847.
63. Connell, *Masculinities*, 79.

opposition to exclusionary ideologies and practices."[64] The discussion recognizes the Gospel of Mark's emergence from and reinscribing of a particular set of imperialized-colonized circumstances and constructions of gender. Yet to study the Gospel is not to be entrenched in this past but to "encourage readers to engage gendered and sexed politics in their own sphere of influence."[65] This investigation of an ancient text, Mark's Gospel, matters, then, not primarily as an end in itself but because it is a contemporary text, very influential for present-day faith communities and, through them, for our world in which harmful constructions of masculinity and patriarchal structures and performances still abound. Critical engagement with this Gospel is necessary so that "our own world might be engaged and enlivened by these ancient texts, insofar as our own understandings of power, gender, ideology and such might be challenged and transformed as a result."[66] To examine ancient constructions of gender and sex facilitates examination of the complexities of contemporary constructions and practices of gendered identities.

***Excursus on Hegemonic Masculinity***

- Hegemonic masculinity names the performance of male dominance and power by a few individuals belonging to a small group of particularly powerful males.
- It involves public actions, competition, and repeated displays.
- These actions subordinate many, including women and most men.
- Others, particularly most men and some women, are complicit in this male performance and benefit from a patriarchal dividend.
- Men who perform a different masculinity are marginalized and viewed as feminized.
- In Mark, Jesus' performance of hegemonic masculinity participates in the constructions of masculinity known in the Mediterranean culture and particularly Jewish, Greek, and Roman masculinities.
- Jesus' performance of hegemonic masculinity results in his destruction on the cross by both colonizing power and by the patriarchal will of God.

64. Vander Stichele and Penner, *Contextualizing Gender*, 7, 25.
65. Ibid., 3.
66. Ibid., 6–7, 39–40.

## 4. Kyriarchy/Intersectionality

The above discussion contains within it a recognition that, while gender (feminist and masculinity) constructions are foregrounded in this study, they cannot be separated from the practices and structures of other power relations of dominations and subordinations such as ethnicity, class/social status, race, sexuality, disability, nationalism, and imperialism. These simultaneous "sites of oppression" have been theorized variously as "kyriarchy" or "intersectionality."

Nancy Ramsay summarizes some of the dominant features of intersectionality, a "model that effectively addresses complex individual, relational, structural, and ideological aspects of domination and privilege arising from forms of difference treated oppressively."[67] She identifies some of its contours and goals:

- Its telos is social justice, especially "empowering those who experience multiple dimensions of inequality," as well as empowering "coalitions that respect differences."
- It provides a framework to engage "the dynamic complexity of multiple forms of inequality."
- It recognizes that "differences in systems such as gender, race, class, and sexuality express power relationships of dominance."
- It recognizes that such systems "are embedded in three societal domains—ideological, political, economic." They are "simultaneous, interrelated systems of inequality based on social group relationships of power and control" and expressed in "both macro systems (institutional) and micro systems (individual and psychological)."
- While it recognizes "matrices of domination and oppression" that all persons experience, it does not rank oppressions or inequalities but seeks to "disclose the mutual dynamism in the power struggle over socially valued resources."

Ramsay's summary highlights important multivalence in the contours of the intersectionality of various forms of dominance and oppression.

67. Nancy J. Ramsay, "Intersectionality: A Model for Addressing the Complexity of Oppression and Privilege," *Pastoral Psychology* 63 (2014): 453–69, esp. 455 for her outline of its "contours and goals."

These intersectionalities show that gender constructions cannot be isolated from other power relationships. She also recognizes that "such differences are historically and geographically contextual."

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza helpfully describes the presence of such intersectionalities in the world that shaped Mark's Gospel. She designates such dynamics with the term "kyriarchy":[68]

> In classical antiquity, the rule of the emperor, lord, slave master, husband, or the elite, freeborn, propertied, educated gentleman to whom disenfranchised men and all wo/men were subordinated is best characterized as *kyriarchy.* In antiquity, the social system of kyriarchy was institutionalized in empire. . . . Kyriarchy is best theorized as a complex pyramidal system of intersecting multiplicative social and religious structures of superordination and subordination. Kyriarchal relations of domination are built on elite male property rights as well as on the exploitation, dependency, inferiority, and obedience of wo/man who signify all those subordinated.[69]

This perspective identifies the complexity of the hierarchical and male-dominated world of Mark's Gospel.

### *The Gospel of Mark Inscribes Imperial Structures*

The Gospel variously reinscribes and decenters kyriarchy in setting its narrative in a colonized province of the Roman Empire, namely, Galilee/Judea. Imperial power, gender, social class, ethnicity, and disability simultaneously intersect in the personnel and structures of Rome's empire that constitute the Gospel's narrative world. These imperialized-colonized personnel and structures include the emperor (Mark 12:13-17); the provincial governor Pilate (15:1-15); local Judean elite allies based in Jerusalem and its temple, such as chief priests, Pharisees, Herodians, scribes, Sadducees (11:27-33); the Rome-sanctioned client or puppet king Herod, his wife Herodias, and the leaders of Galilee (6:14-29); elite absentee landowners and slave owners (12:1-2); tax and rent collection and other economic controls (1:16-20; 2:13-17); soldiers (15:16-20); rebels who

68. "Kyriarchy" derives from the Greek words κύριος, *kyrios*, "lord," and ἀρχή, *archē*, "rule."

69. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Introduction: Exploring the Intersections of Race, Gender, Status, and Ethnicity in Early Christian Studies," in *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings: Investigating Race, Gender, and Ethnicity in Early Christian Studies*, ed. Laura Nasrallah and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 9.

are executed by the death penalty of crucifixion (15:26-27); food access issues; numerous nonelites or "crowds" who struggle with living on a daily basis; slaves; and the pervasive presence of the sick/disabled and demon-possessed. Employing kyriarchy or intersectionality highlights the ambivalent position of the Jerusalem leaders—chief priests, scribes, Pharisees, Herodians. They are powerful elite men, representatives of a native religious tradition as well as the local political-societal rulers. Yet they are colonized provincial men, their power dependent on and indebted to the favor and goodwill of Rome's system personified by Rome's governor who appointed the chief priest. They shared power in a tensive and contestive relationship with the governor, bound together by the common interest of protecting this hierarchical societal structure, which they dominated by subordinating and benefiting from the vast majority of the population, namely, nonelite women and men. Gender, social class, religious tradition, ethnicity, and imperial power intersect.

### *Rome's Hierarchical World*

Steven Friesen has proposed that the Roman world comprised a seven-tiered socio-economic hierarchy and has estimated the percentage each tier occupied in the Roman world.[70]

| | |
|---|---|
| PS1, Imperial Elites<br>Estimated 0.04% of the population | The imperial dynasty, Roman senatorial families, a few retainers, local royalty, a few freedpersons |
| PS2, Provincial elites<br>Estimated 1.00% | Decurial families, some freedpersons, some retired military officers |
| PS3, Municipal Elites<br>Estimated 1.76% | Most decurial families, wealthy men and women who do not hold office, some freedpersons, some retainers, some veterans, some merchants |
| PS4, Those with moderate surplus resources<br>Estimated 7% | Some merchants, some traders, some freedpersons, some artisans (especially those who employ others) and military veterans |

70. Steven Friesen, "Poverty in Pauline Studies: Beyond the So-called New Consensus," *JSNT* 26 (2004): 322–61. The abbreviation "PS" designates "Poverty Scale."

| | |
|---|---|
| PS5, Economically stable persons living near subsistence level (with reasonable hope of remaining above the minimum level to sustain life)<br>Estimated 22% | Many merchants and traders, regular wage earners, artisans, large shop owners, freedpersons, some farm families |
| PS6, Those living at subsistence level (and often below the minimum level necessary to sustain life)<br>Estimated 40% | Small farm families, laborers (skilled and unskilled), artisans (especially those employed by others), wage earners, most merchants and traders, small shop/tavern owners |
| PS7, Those living below subsistence level<br>Estimated 28% | Some farm families, unattached widows, orphans, beggars, disabled, unskilled day laborers, prisoners |

It is clear from the chart that the powerful (mostly male) leaders occupied the top three levels, some 3 percent of society. This group enjoyed enormous wealth, power, and status, controlling large land holdings; financing trade; benefitting from taxes, tributes, and rents; and enjoying a luxurious lifestyle. While people in level 4 enjoyed a life with some material surplus, those in levels 5 and 6, over 60 percent of the population, struggled in varying degrees of poverty, food insecurity, pervasive disease, powerlessness, and considerable stress to sustain their lives on a daily basis. The bottom tier, some 28 percent, comprised those with few resources who lived miserable lives below subsistence level. Levels 5–7, therefore, comprised around 80–90 percent of the population living in varying degrees of life-threatening poverty.[71]

### *Jesus in the Imperial Mix*

It is in this intersecting matrix of kyriarchy that the Gospel of Mark positions and constructs Jesus. He is a nonelite, provincial male, though

71. In an important contribution, Bruce W. Longenecker (*Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010], 36–59, esp. 53) revises Friesen's "Poverty Scale" to construct an "Economy Scale" ("ES"), which is a little more optimistic. Like Friesen, he employs seven gradations but with differing estimates of percentages. The biggest differences are Longenecker's larger "middling" level 4 (15%) and smaller level 6 (30%). His scale is: ES1-3, 3% (same as Friesen), ES 4, 15% (Friesen, 7%), ES 5, 27% (Friesen 22%), ES 6, 30% (Friesen 40%), ES 7, 25% (Friesen 28%).

with considerable rhetorical and ideological power in attracting nonelite followers—men and women (1:16-20; 3:13-19, 31-35; 15:40-41) and crowds (1:32-34, 39), people in the lower three socio-economic levels. He especially has control over socially valued resources, which he dispenses for the benefit of low-status people, namely, health (1:32-34), food (6:30-44; 8:1-10), release from demonic powers (5:1-20), the experience of community (3:31-35; 15:40-41), and life-giving interpretations of the tradition (2:23–3:6). Those of low status and/or some status and provincial men and women benefit (5:21-43), as do Jews and Gentiles (7:24-30) and the elderly (7:9-13). The elites of the imperial system cannot ensure the provision of these valued resources for nonelites; in fact, their economic and military practices of taxation and forced labor (15:21) deprive people of life by removing resources and thereby confining many nonelites to struggles for daily food, the consequences of diseases of deprivation and contagion, and the experiences of demonic possession that feature prominently in contexts of colonial domination. Accordingly, in rolling back and repairing this imperial damage through healings, feedings, exorcisms, and community, Jesus is a threat to their domination system. His elimination by the death penalty—an instrument of the power of the Roman governor, exercised in alliance with dependent provincial men—is certain.

Likewise, in this mix, the women of Mark's narrative (and of the community addressed by the Gospel, wherever it might be located) lived in what Seong Hee Kim, borrowing from Homi Bhabha, recognizes as a hybrid existence, occupying an ambivalent third space between God's kingdom/empire and Rome's kingdom/empire, the latter of which is the instrument of Satan's empire.[72] Hybridity incorporates both the colonizer's dominance as well as interdependence with the colonized, which effects cultural transformation, a space of submission yet also of subversion that can challenge and contest the dominant power relations. So, for example, the nonelite or subaltern woman who anoints Jesus recognizes him as a new and alternative king or emperor, sustaining him in his task while interrupting and transforming the oppressive boundaries to create an alternative reality (14:3-9).[73]

Attention throughout to intersectionality or kyriarchy recognizes that a gender focus on the roles of women in the environments and words of Mark's Gospel cannot be separated from these "issues of power, author-

72. Kim, *Mark, Women and Empire*, 70–78.
73. Ibid., 112–13.

ity, ethnicity, race, and class, (which) are inextricably intertwined," nor can they be separated from "issues about which women are concerned, e.g., poverty, food, health, the environment, water, etc."[74]

In this commentary on the whole of Mark's Gospel from a feminist/gender perspective, and informed by previous feminist work, I attend to the important tasks of the recognition, recovery, and reconstruction (voice and agency) of the presence and roles of women in the narrative while also pursuing two further dimensions: the exposure of constructions of masculinity that reflect and reinscribe paradigms of masculinity dominant in the Roman imperial world and attention to kyriarchy or the intersections of gender with various systems of power relationships of dominance that the text also attests.

***Excursus on Rome's Empire***

- Hierarchical: Power, wealth, and status were concentrated in the hands of a small ruling elite, including leaders in provincial cities.
- Agrarian: Land was fundamental to power, wealth, and status, with urban cities important for trade, commerce, and manufacturing.
- Military: Roman legions, including provincial auxiliaries, enforced the power of imperial elites; the threat of military action also ensured compliance.
- Proprietary: Imperial rulers assumed control over the production, resources, and labor of the empire and used various means (tax, rents, tributes, etc.) to transfer resources from lower levels to elites. This practice impacted the food supply, for example, with many struggling for food security and impacted by widespread diseases from lowered deficiency, deprivation, and contagion.
- Extreme Vertical Structure: By some estimates, the ruling elites comprised some 2–3 percent of the population, with another 10 percent or so forming a middling group with good resources. The remaining 80 percent or so comprised to varying degrees the poor, living around, at, or under subsistence levels, at least for part of each year.
- A Slave Economy: The empire depended

74. "Revised Guidelines for Contributors," Wisdom Commentary series, 4–5.

significantly on slave labor. Perhaps 10–15 percent of the empire's residents were slaves (some propose higher figures). Many came from armies and populations captured in battle; others were born into slavery. A significant number worked in agriculture; others were domestic workers or labored in mines or mills. Some had considerable skills, especially in business and estate management. Many were exposed to harsh conditions, abuse, and sexual exploitation.

- Sanctioned by Religious Claims: The empire was understood to be commissioned by the gods, who had given Rome domination over the world in the form of "empire without end . . . to rule the world . . . to crown peace with justice, to spare the vanquished and to crush the power" (Vergil, *Aen.* 1.278; 6.851–53).
- Resistance: Wherever power is asserted, resistance is inevitable. There were, though, relatively few outbreaks of open, violent revolt. More commonly, locals negotiated the empire with multivalent, simultaneous means of negotiation, including compliance, the development of alternative narratives, ambiguous actions, and calculated, self-protective acts of dissent.

## 5. The Visibility of Women and Women Followers in Mark?

In terms of the visibility of women in the Gospel, feminist work has recognized the presence of women in the following ten scenes, sometimes with agency and/or voice:

- the healing of Simon's mother-in-law (1:29-31)
- Jesus' mother and sisters (3:20-35)
- the healing of the woman with a hemorrhage and the raising of Jairus's daughter (5:21-43)
- Herodias and her daughter (6:14-29)
- the Syrophoenician woman and the exorcism of her daughter (7:24-30)
- the poor widow in the temple (12:41-44)

- the woman who anoints Jesus (14:3-9)
- the slave girl who challenges Peter (14:53-54, 66-72)
- the women followers at Jesus' crucifixion and burial (15:40-41, 47)
- the women followers at the empty tomb (16:1-8)

In the commentary that follows, my engagement with these scenes is informed by extensive feminist discussions. That is, I will draw on a range of contemporary feminist discussions of each of these scenes to catalogue, and thereby highlight, different perspectives and insights. Often this discussion of the scenes is multilayered and rich, so I will seek to respect the differing emphases in interpretation more than arguing for a particular reading. In this way, I ensure that a number of voices, often neglected in malestream scholarship, are represented and viewpoints offered without seeking to identify winners and losers. And of course, beyond these scenes, where there are distinctive feminist contributions on other parts of the Gospel, I will draw on those contributions also to expand the conversation.

In addition, I judge it important to note the retrospective effect of 15:40-41 for readers engaging the whole Gospel.[75] These verses identify some women at Jesus' crucifixion: "among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem."

These verses are immensely important for reading the Gospel for three reasons. (1) They identify women followers of Jesus; (2) they identify a sizeable group of women followers, naming three women, and refer to a wider group of "many other women"; and (3) they identify these women as both present with Jesus throughout his Galilean and Jerusalem activity and their support for or provisioning of his activity. That is, women followers are present with Jesus throughout the whole of his activity narrated in the Gospel even though the Gospel invisibilizes them by not making their presence visible until 15:40-41.

75. Victoria Phillips, "Full Disclosure: Towards a Complete Characterization of the Women Who Followed Jesus in the Gospel According to Mark," in *Transformative Encounters: Jesus and Women Re-viewed*, ed. Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger, BibInt 43 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 13–32.

I understand this notice at the end of the Gospel that women followers accompanied Jesus throughout his activity in Galilee and Jerusalem to impact my reading of the whole Gospel. The Gospel's first fourteen chapters, reflecting the androcentric world that shaped them, do not make the presence of these women explicit. As a reader of the whole Gospel, I choose to take this belated recognition that women followers accompanied Jesus throughout his activity and make it explicit in the Gospel's narration. Throughout the commentary, then, I draw attention to the presence of these women in the Gospel scenes. To do so, I generally avoid the term "the disciples" even though the Gospel uses the term more than forty times.[76] Doing so destabilizes the common association of the term for many readers with only the twelve male disciples who are named in 3:13-19, identified as apostles[77] and sometimes referred to as "the twelve."[78] When the language of the twelve is used, or when some of the twelve apostles are named, clearly this inner group of males is in view. But beyond these uses, the term "disciple" can include both male and female followers, so I use the term "follower."

As several texts make clear, the twelve males are not an exclusive group of disciples/ followers. By 2:15, we have read accounts of only five males being called to follow Jesus (1:16-20; 2:13-14), four of whom are identified in the list of apostles in 3:13-19, while one (Levi) is not included. Yet in 2:15, "Jesus and his disciples" are said to be at the meal in Levi's house. We would be mistaken for several reasons if we understood these "disciples" to consist of only five males. First, verse 15b explains, "for there were many and they followed him," clearly indicating more than five followers. Second, 15:40-41 indicates that many women fol-

76. The meaning of the term μαθητής, "disciple," is "pupil, apprentice" (BDAG, 609). Nowhere in the Gospel is it made explicit what are the qualifications for or duties of a disciple. Disciples are equated with followers at 2:15; 6:1; and 8:34.

77. The meaning of ἀπόστολος, "apostle," is "one sent" as a delegate, envoy, messenger (BDAG, 122). While Mark's Gospel uses it only of the twelve male disciples, other texts of the early Jesus movement identify other figures as apostles including Paul (Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 1 Tim 1:1; 2 Tim 1:1; Tit 1:1); Apollos (1 Cor 4:9); Barnabas (1 Cor 9:5-6; Acts 14:4, 14); Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25); Silvanus and Timothy (1 Thess 2:7 with 1:1); and Andronicus and Junia (Rom 16:7). It is notable that Junia is a woman's name.

78. "The twelve" are referred to in 4:10; 6:7; 9:35; 10:32; 11:11; 14:10, 17, 20, 43. Mercedes Navarro Puerto ("Female Disciples in Mark? The 'Problematizing' of a Concept," in *Gospels: Narrative and History*, The Bible and Women, New Testament 2.1, ed. Mercedes Navarro Puerto and Marinella Perroni, English ed. Amy-Jill Levine [Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015], 144–72) also problematizes the notion of disciple/discipleship associated with the twelve male disciples and favors the language of followers.

lowed Jesus throughout his Galilean activity and so must be assumed to be present even when the language of "disciples" is used. Third, Jesus' household, marked not by birth or gender but by doing the will of God, is peopled by mothers, brothers, and sisters (3:35). Fourth, Elizabeth Struthers Malbon notes that "followership" is not "exclusive." She writes:

> The [twelve male] disciples are not the only Markan characters who follow Jesus. Throughout the narrative, exceptional individuals believe in Jesus (Jairus, 5:22-24a, 35-43), follow Jesus (Bartimaeus, 10:46-52), agree with Jesus (one of the scribes, 12:28-34), recognize Jesus (centurion, 15:39 [?]), honor Jesus (Joseph of Arimathea, 15:42-46)—and thus exemplify to the reader, in at least one special action, what following Jesus entails.[79]

To emphasize the presence of both women and men with Jesus and this somewhat fluid reference to disciples, following, the twelve, apostles, and disciples, I adopt the strategy of using the language of "Jesus-followers" or "followers" to highlight the gender-inclusive nature of those committed to him.

In addition, I make visible the presence of women in the crowds that encounter Jesus and are the recipients of his benefits. So I assume the crowds that hear Jesus' teaching (2:4, 13; 4:1; 10:2) or that benefit from his works of power (3:9; 6:45; 8:2) to include women as well as men. I make the presence of these women explicit throughout the commentary also.

## 6. Origins of Mark's Gospel

Finally, interpretations of a biblical text like Mark's Gospel are not only shaped by the perspectives, experiences, and questions of interpreters such as the gender-centered and intersecting concerns I have outlined in the previous pages. Interpretations are also impacted by the world from which the text emerged, a world that leaves its mark on the text in numerous ways, though this world does not limit or confine interpretation for audiences in different social locations and periods of time. In this section I briefly engage questions of when, where, why, for whom, and by whom the Gospel of Mark was written. The short answer for each of these five questions is that no one knows for certain! There are, of course, numerous theories and not enough space here to engage them in any detail. I make the following brief observations to express some of

79. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "Fallible Followers: Women and Men in the Gospel of Mark," *Semeia* 28 (1983): 29–48, esp. 31.

my own assumptions about the Gospel that influence my engagement with the text throughout the commentary that follows.

Where? Three places in particular have been suggested for the Gospel's writing: Galilee, Syria, and Rome. I don't think any ancient evidence makes any of the three options especially compelling. I am not persuaded by the way some have argued for Galilee/Syria,[80] which leaves, on the basis of some early church testimony, the conventional place of writing as Rome. I readily recognize, though, that the evidence for Rome is hardly compelling. Nevertheless, the positing of Rome as at least a place where the Gospel was read has important implications as I will elaborate below.

When? Scholars have suggested dates for the Gospel from the mid-60s to the mid-70s CE. The key evidence concerns the reference at the beginning of chapter 13 to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. Do we read this as referring to something about to happen or something that has recently happened when Roman troops stormed into the city and burned the temple in 70 CE? As my comments on several passages indicate (11:1-26; 12:1-12; 13:1-8), I think the latter option is more convincing. I think the Gospel addresses this post-70 situation by seeking to explain why Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed in 70 CE and how women and men who were followers of Jesus crucified by the Romans might live in a world overshadowed by a massive fresh display of Roman power.

Why? These assumptions about place and time matter because they point to crucial circumstances and experiences impacting the Gospel text and its interpretation. I think the Gospel is addressed to male and female Jesus-followers, mostly nonelites, in Rome around 71 CE who have witnessed a fresh assertion and celebration of Roman power. The emperor Vespasian emerged victorious from the civil war of 68–69. Along with his son, the future emperor Titus, Vespasian also emerged victorious in the war in Judea and Jerusalem when the latter was destroyed along with its temple in 70 CE. In 71 CE, a triumph or huge victory parade and party were held in Rome, displaying Roman military and political power, economic reach, and divine sanction as the chosen of the gods. This occasion was, of course, a huge display of masculinity, of manly dominance, of defeat of womanly Judea. Judean captives were displayed as women, as well as men, dominated by manly Roman soldiers on coins known as *Judea capta* coins. I suggest that the Gospel attempts to guide Jesus-followers in negotiating or making their way in the midst of this fresh assertion of Roman power and ideology. The Gospel was written, I

80. Warren Carter, "Mark and Syria: An Assessment," *ExpTim* 125 (2014): 531–37.

am suggesting, in a context where dominant military and imperial masculinity was performed and celebrated and where its dividend of power benefitted a small elite group of men and women in particular, while it subjugated, enslaved, and/or destroyed nonelite men and women as well as conquered, foreign, provincial "unmen." Jesus imitates, challenges, and succumbs to this dominant masculinity in the Gospel, overcoming it in his resurrection and promising to replace it (by imitation) when he returns in full power as Son of Man to establish God's empire.

To Whom? Living in a large city such as Rome was not just a matter of ideas and allegiances. For elites it was a fairly comfortable experience, marked by conspicuous consumption, competition for status and honor, and assertion of power. For nonelite women and men, it was a matter of negotiating some really desperate socio-economic conditions on a daily basis. Numerous studies have identified some of the contours of the miserable existence many nonelites, women and men, experienced:

- poor housing structures vulnerable to collapse and fire
- overcrowding
- inadequate hygiene (water supply, sewers, drains)
- erratic and nutritionally inadequate food supply and shortages
- diseases of contagion and deficiency
- harsh working conditions dominated by manual labor
- slavery with vulnerability to any and every whim of a master/mistress
- hierarchical social interactions that inflicted constant indignities and deference
- prostitution
- high infant- and child-mortality rates (perhaps 50 percent did not survive to age ten)
- short life spans (twenty-five years for nonelites?)
- ethnic tensions from immigration and xenophobia
- crime
- natural disasters like fires, floods, and food shortages
- high levels of stress

There were gradations in levels of poverty. Some lived with some comfort above the subsistence level, and many lived desperate lives cycling around subsistence levels depending on the seasons, while others struggled to survive below subsistence levels. I cannot separate my reading of Mark's Gospel from such pressing social experiences that shaped the daily lives of those women and men for whom it was written. I think it engages and critiques this imperial world and points to God's purposes for a world of flourishing and community for all women and men. Gender roles, privilege, and discrimination are crucial dynamics in this world as they intersect with all sorts of structures and debilitating consequences of power.

By whom? We do not know the author of the Gospel. The name Mark came to be associated with it later in the second century. Does the name reflect an accurate historical memory of the writer as a follower of Jesus, as some think, drawing on the controversial testimony of a tradition associated with Papias and Eusebius? Is this Mark to be identified with one of the numerous Marks named in the New Testament, thereby using apostolic male associates to "author-ize" the story? Was the name added later to the Gospel to give it some masculine gravitas or apostolic heft since men by the name of "Mark" are associated with both Peter (Acts 12:12-17; 1 Pet 5:13) and Paul (Phlm 24; Col 4:10)? Of course, the name Mark was also associated with various powerful Roman men, including two second-century emperors: Trajan and Aurelius. Was it added, then, in imitation of imperial ways even as it simultaneously undermined Roman imperial ways and advocated the alternative experience of the empire of God?

No reading of Mark's Gospel can ever be comprehensive. In this introduction, I have identified some of the multivalent and intersecting concerns that this reading foregrounds. Building on and employing impressive feminist scholarship, my dominant lens is that of gender constructions that embrace both feminist and masculinity perspectives along with attention to their intersections with various structures of imperial power or kyriarchy (class or social status, ethnicity, race, sexuality, disability, etc.).

***Where in the World Was Mark?***

Scholars have debated with great intensity the location of the Gospel of Mark's author and audience. The primary proposals have been made for Rome, southern Syria, and Galilee. Researchers have drawn on a variety of evidence to make their claims more persuasive. For example, they have considered early church traditions of Mark as Peter's interpreter, knowledge or ignorance of the geography through which Jesus travels, the use of Latin terms or a Latin-influenced way of writing Greek, and the type of coin the poor widow contributes (Mark 12:42) among other details.

What difference does the location of the author and/or audience make? Some scholars hope that by identifying the context in which or for which Mark's Gospel was written and read (most assume it was the same place) it will allow them to interpret the text authoritatively. For example, if the Gospel were written in Rome, then Mark may have intended to counter the imperial propaganda to which his audience was exposed. Thus, we should pay attention to titles and ways in which Jesus is shown to be a greater "messiah" or "savior" than the emperor.[81] But if the Gospel were written in Galilee, as Hendrika N. Roskam argues,[82] then it was written to downplay the political implications of the title "Christ" and to show that Jesus was not an anti-Roman rebel but G*d's[83] agent sent to establish a spiritual (not earthly) kingdom. Finally, if the Gospel were written in Syria, the author's knowledge of two Jewish leaders appearing in royal robes in the Jerusalem temple during the revolt against Rome (66–70 CE) might have caused Mark to deemphasize Davidic messianism in his portrayal of Jesus.[84]

These approaches privilege the author's intentions in the making of meaning. The focus is on the author, rather than on the audience, who is often described in rather generic and particularly ethnic terms such as "Jewish" or "Gentile." Some scholars, myself included, believe that it is the reader who interprets the text and generates meaning. An intersectional feminist approach offers insight into a potential multiplicity of

81. Adam Winn, *The Purpose of Mark's Gospel: An Early Christian Response to Roman Imperial Propaganda*, WUNT 2.245 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

82. Hendrika N. Roskam, ed., *The Purpose of the Gospel of Mark in Its Historical and Social Context*, NovTSup 114 (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

83. See above, p. xxxvi on G*d.

84. Joel Marcus, *Mark: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 2 vols., AB 27 (New York: Doubleday; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000, 2009).

valid interpretations by audience members. This means paying attention to their geographical and social location in terms appropriate to that time period, such as being slaves/freed/freeborn, their relationship to the Jewish community, and their location on a sliding scale of masculinity (rather than to modern constructions of sexual orientation and gender identity).

Geographic location is, nevertheless, still an important factor today as readers in developed and developing countries, in urban and rural areas, in countries ruled by elected leaders or dictators bring different experiences and worldviews to their engagement with the gospel text.

*Annelies Moeser*

# Mark 1:1-45

## *Introducing the Most Powerful Man*

The Gospel of Mark begins by copying a common convention of establishing male power in Rome's world. It provides divine sanction for Jesus' great power just as divine sanction was employed to secure the power of Rome's male-ruled empire (Vergil, *Aen.* 1.254–82) and the power of emperors such as Augustus (Suetonius, *Aug.* 94, Apollo), Nero (Seneca, *Clem.* 1.2), Vespasian (Josephus, *J.W.* 4.622), and Trajan (Pliny the Younger, *Pan.* 94).

Mark 1 introduces Jesus as God's powerful representative and the dominant male in the story (1:1-13). The constant male gaze renders women invisible in the chapter except for the brief appearance of Peter's mother-in-law in 1:29-31. After the initial establishing of Jesus' importance and hegemonic masculinity by summoning subordinate males as witnesses (1:1-13), Jesus commences his public activity, creating considerable public interest as he announces God's empire/reign, calls followers, exorcises spirits, heals sick people, and preaches (1:14-45).[1]

1. For an elaboration of hegemonic masculinity, see the author's introduction, section 3.

*Mark 1:1*

1:1The beginning of the good news of
Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
2As it is written in the prophet
Isaiah,
"See, I am sending my messenger
ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;
3the voice of one crying out in the
wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,'"
4John the baptizer appeared in the
wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of
repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
5And people from the whole Judean
countryside and all the people of Jeru-
salem were going out to him, and were
baptized by him in the river Jordan,
confessing their sins. 6Now John was
clothed with camel's hair, with a leather
belt around his waist, and he ate lo-
custs and wild honey. 7He proclaimed,
"The one who is more powerful than
I is coming after me; I am not worthy
to stoop down and untie the thong of
his sandals. 8I have baptized you with
water; but he will baptize you with the
Holy Spirit."

## Six Male Witnesses (1:1-8)

This opening section introduces Jesus, the story's main character and dominant male figure. As I will explain shortly, it offers testimony from six male witnesses: the narrator (1:1; whom I assume to be a male given the male-focused narrative), Isaiah, Moses, Malachi, Elijah (1:2-3), and John the Baptist (1:4-8). Each has status and authority in his own right, yet they proclaim Jesus' greater status and authority. The text is relentlessly androcentric in presenting Jesus and constructing the narrative world. Women are, as Joanna Dewey observes, largely invisible in Mark's opening chapters.[2] We might imagine women among the "people" who are addressed by John the Baptist in 1:5 and as participants in the divine work he announces. Nevertheless, women readers who are suspicious of assertions of male power will be troubled by this male-dominated introduction. In reading further, various poses as resisting, suspicious, questioning, and compliant readers will be needed.

The first witness, the narrator, introduces Jesus with a densely packed headline (1:1). Jesus is "the beginning" or, as it could also be translated, the "source" or "authority" of good news. The term εὐαγγέλιον, "good news," evokes ruling power—both imperial and divine—and so places

2. Joanna Dewey, "The Gospel of Mark," in *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Commentary*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, 2 vols. (New York: Crossroad, 1993, 1994), 2.479.

the very powerful Jesus in exalted company.[3] On the one hand, Hebrew Bible texts describe the good news of God's action of outpowering the apparently supreme power of Babylonian imperialism that had taken Israel's leadership into exile after defeating Jerusalem in 587 BCE. God returns the people to the land and restores Jerusalem by using the Persian ruler Cyrus to defeat Babylon (Isa 44:28–45:1). Isaiah 52:7 celebrates this "good news" as "God's reign" over the nations and presents God in the powerful masculine roles of warrior and king. On the other hand, an inscription from Priene celebrates the birthday of the emperor Augustus as "the beginning of the good news for the world."[4] The Jewish writer Josephus announces "the good news" of Vespasian becoming emperor after the civil war in 68–69 CE (*J.W.* 4.618). This opening announcement of the "good news" of God's rule in relation to Jesus draws on these traditions. It both imitates and rivals the assertions of the good news of Rome's ruling imperial power concentrated in its supremely dominant male emperors. Jesus is located in and continues this divinely sanctioned and imperial male power paradigm.

The narrator identifies Jesus as sanctioned by God. The term χριστός, "Christ" (or משיח, "Messiah," in Hebrew), literally means "anointed." It signifies an agent whom God has commissioned, such as the Gentile Persian ruler Cyrus (Isa 44:28–45:1), priests (Lev 4:3, 5), kings (Ps 2:2), and prophets (1 Kgs 19:16).

Closer to Mark's time, there were diverse expectations concerning Messiah figures who were to restore the world to God's purposes.[5] These male figures included a Davidic king "anointed" to drive out the Romans from Jerusalem "by the word of his mouth" (Pss. Sol. 17:24, 32; 18:5, 7); a heavenly judge "anointed" to judge by vindicating the righteous and condemning wicked kings and landowners (1 En. 48:10; 52:4); a figure "anointed" to reign for four hundred years, after which he dies and then God creates a new world (4 Ezra 7:26-44). There was no uniform or universal expectation for the Christ/messiah in the first century CE. It was neither a majority nor a monolithic expectation. To call Jesus

3. John Dickson, "Gospel as News: From Aristophanes to the Apostle Paul," *NTS* 51 (2005): 212–30.

4. Wilhelm Dittenberger, ed., *Orientis Graecae Inscriptiones Selectae*, 2 vols. (Hildesheim: Olms, 1960), 2.48–60 (*OGIS* 458); Frederick Danker, *Benefactor: Epigraphic Study of a Graeco-Roman and New Testament Semantic Field* (St. Louis: Clayton, 1982), 215–22.

5. Marinus de Jonge, "Messiah," *ABD* 4.777–88.

"Christ" establishes his God-commissioned power to bring about God's purposes and rule. What that looks like and how Jesus accomplishes these purposes will be clarified only in reading on through the Gospel.

The narrator then identifies Jesus as "Son of God" (1:1). The language is simultaneously authoritative, masculine, imperial, and biblical. This masculine term "Son of God" does not yet bear the high christological meanings that will develop in subsequent centuries.[6] Nor does Mark elaborate Jesus' sonship in terms of his genealogy, conception, birth, or parentage. Rather, he echoes the biblical tradition in which the term "Son of God" emphasizes relationships of favor and faithfulness whereby a person or people enact divine purposes. Reflecting its patriarchal context, the Hebrew Bible uses this masculine language to designate God's chosen people Israel as children of God (Exod 4:22; Hos 11:1), prophets (Wis 7:27), and kings (Ps 2:7; 2 Sam 7:14) who represent God's purposes and rule. Continuing the echoes of imperial power, the term also designated Roman emperors like Augustus and Vespasian as descended from and agents of the gods.[7] Its use here associates Jesus with these elevated cultural claims, mirroring and reinscribing masculine and imperial language in ascribing honor, status, and power to Jesus as God's commissioned Christ and Son of God. Yet there are paradoxes. To call Jesus "Son of God" is also a subversive claim in creating Jesus as a potential challenger to Roman power in manifesting God's good news. And we should not forget that Jesus is not a societal, high-status man. He is low status, a carpenter (6:3), perhaps level 5 or, more likely, level 6 (living around subsistence level) on Friesen's seven-level scheme, from a province under Roman power (see sections 4–5 in the author's introduction).[8] As the agent of God's purposes, Jesus' obedience will end in his death.

The net result of verse 1 is a high-powered testimony to Jesus in terms of competing traditions: biblical traditions concerning God's ruling actions in the world and imperial traditions concerning the dominance of Rome's rulers and agents. Evoking these multiple traditions constructs

6. Adela Yarbro Collins, "Mark and His Readers: The Son of God Among Jews," *HTR* 92 (1999): 393–408; Collins, "Mark and His Readers: The Son of God Among Greeks and Romans," *HTR* 93 (2000): 85–100; Michael Peppard, *The Son of God in the Roman World: Divine Sonship in Its Social and Political Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

7. Robert Mowery, "The Son of God in Roman Imperial Titles and Matthew," *Bib* 83 (2002): 100–110.

8. Steven Friesen, "Poverty in Pauline Studies: Beyond the So-Called New Consensus," *JSNT* 26 (2004): 323–61; "Author's Introduction," section 4, lx–lxi.

Jesus as a powerful male agent of divine purposes. Part of the claim is that divine purposes are encountered in *this* agent, not, for example, in Rome despite its imperial claims to rule as the agent of the gods. While the imperial and biblical language of good news and Son of God contest standard Roman claims to supreme power, verse 1 also mimics and mirrors them. The verse transfers claims to Jesus and sets him in the (imperializing and masculinizing) biblical story, creating competition with rival imperial claims. This opening headline raises questions as to how Jesus will live out his very masculine identity as Christ and son of God, what he is to accomplish, and how he is to accomplish it. These questions can be answered only in reading on through the Gospel.

After the narrator's intense opening headline that witnesses to Jesus' identity, the narrative adds five male prophetic figures to witness to Jesus as Christ and Son of God—Isaiah, Moses, Malachi, Elijah, and John the Baptist. These men, important prophetic figures in their own right, are constructed here as subservient to and witnesses for Jesus, thereby elevating his importance. Linking significant figures from the past to a contemporary figure, Jesus, was a common way to establish the latter's greater authority. The lineup of prophets selectively comprises only males, despite the fact that there were female prophets in Israel's traditions: Miriam (Exod 15:20), Deborah (Judg 4:4), the unnamed woman prophet (Isa 8:3), Huldah (2 Chr 34:22), women prophets in Ezekiel (Ezek 13:17) and Joel (Joel 2:18), No'adiah (Neh 6:14; Joel 2:28), and the three daughters of Heman (1 Chr 25:4-5). And there were female prophets in the Greco-Roman world such as the Sibyl, Anna (Luke 2:36), the slave girl (Acts 16:16-18), and the four unmarried daughters of Philip (Acts 21:8-9).[9] But Mark's androcentric author summons only male prophets to bolster Jesus' status as Christ and Son.

Verse 2 names Isaiah as the second witness (after the narrator in v. 1). The quote in verses 2 and 3 comes from Isaiah 40:3 but also introduces elements of Exodus 23:30 (traditionally ascribed to Moses) and Malachi 3:1, which announces that the prophet Elijah will return. Not only does the collage associate Jesus with four powerful prophets (Isaiah, Moses, Malachi, and Elijah), the texts also allude to powerful divine actions: the

9. Wilda Gafney, *Daughters of Miriam: Women Prophets in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008); David Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 34–48; Herbert William Parke, *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1988), 136–43; Michael Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 211–39.

exodus from slavery in Egypt and entry to the promised land (Exodus/Moses), the return from exile under Babylonian rule (Isa 40), and the expectation of God establishing God's reign on earth (Malachi and Elijah). Associating Jesus with these powerful divine acts elevates his status and raises expectations of great divine actions through Jesus' activity. By parading these prophetic figures as witnesses to Jesus, they also sustain his hegemonic masculinity (see the author's introduction, section 3).

Another male prophetic witness, John the Baptist, emerges in verses 4-8. He is the messenger who is to prepare the way of the Lord outlined in the citation in verses 2-3. He appears in the wilderness, a location that evokes God's work in bringing the people out of slavery in Egypt under Moses' leadership. Mark does not present John as announcing judgment (as in Matt 3:7-10 and Luke 3:7-9). Rather, he facilitates a turn toward an encounter with God through two actions, preaching (elaborated in 1:7-8) and baptism that signifies repentance and forgiveness for sins (1:4). Repentance literally means a "change of mind" reflected in a change of living that expresses the divine will; sin comprises that which is contrary to God's will. John's baptism signifies a washing or cleansing through which forgiveness is encountered. Some Christian interpreters insist falsely that forgiveness was or is not available apart from Jesus. This claim is false as texts such as Psalms 32:5; 51; Daniel 9; the Prayer of Manasseh[10]—and John's baptism—indicate.

Clearly John is an important man of God in preparing the way for the coming of God in the activities of Jesus. Many people respond positively to his proclaiming and baptizing mission (1:5), including "the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem." We might imagine women as well as men among these responsive people.

**TRANSLATION MATTERS**

The phrase in 1:5 οἱ Ἱεροσολυμῖται πάντες, rendered by NRSV as "all the people of Jerusalem," is literally "all the Jerusalemites." It describes the residents of Jerusalem with a masculine plural adjective (πάντες, "all"). This adjective could signify that only men from Jerusalem respond positively. Or the masculine construction could be understood to include, yet hide, the presence of women and children as participants in the narrative world. While the Greek construction may render women invisible, the English translation "people" expresses an inclusive under-

10. The Prayer of Manasseh is the name of a book found in the Apocrypha.

standing. While women were especially connected with the domestic sphere, they were not confined to houses but were quite active in public and in various working roles, including those involving food, clothing, hairdressing, midwifery, and some artisan work.[11]

The description of John constructs him as a manly man. His clothing and diet associate him with the male prophet Elijah. John's clothing comprised "camel's hair, with a leather belt," the clothing of Elijah, who spoke truth to power in announcing death on Israel's king Ahaziah for turning away from God (2 Kgs 1:1-17, esp. 1:8). John will be identified as Elijah subsequently in 9:9-13. John's clothing is certainly not conventional male attire, but it contributes to the presentation of his masculinity. Hairiness is a sign of virility. John's diet of locusts and wild honey is wilderness food. It evokes the spirit of Elijah and presents John as one who speaks not from urban centers of power and luxury but from societal margins. These intertexts provide divine authority for John's proclamation of a baptism of repentance.

***Excursus on Jerome: John, a Manly Man***

How does John wear his belt? Commonly, its placement "around his waist" is understood to indicate readiness for activity. But the word ὀσφῦς, translated "waist," can also be translated "loins," which refers to the male genitals. The fourth-century Christian theologian Jerome (347–420 CE) attests the existence of an interpretation of John's "girding his loins" as indicating castration and John's identity as a eunuch who serves God. While he reports this interpretation, Jerome himself, however, does not support this interpretation.[12]

11. Robert Knapp, "Lives of Their Own: Ordinary Women," in *Invisible Romans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 53–96, esp. 69–90; Kristina Milnor, "Women in Roman Society," in *The Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World*, ed. Michael Peachin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 609–22, esp. 615–20; Natalie Kampen, *Image and Status: Roman Working Women in Ostia* (Berlin: Mann, 1981), 130–36; Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Y. MacDonald, with Janet Tulloch, *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 1–16.

12. Matthew Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 245–82, esp. 270.

Whatever the reasons commending this practice, castration, frequently self-castration, was understood to be a means of ceasing to be a man, abandoning the power and privileges of maleness, and creating gender ambiguity. It was widely rejected in the early Christian centuries, especially by those wanting to preserve male privileges and identity. Eunuchs were viewed as "an intermediate sex inhabiting a no man's land between the sexes."[13] The mid-fourth-century North African Christian writer Firmicus Maternus, for instance, condemns eunuchs dressing as women and reveals the gender ambiguity eunuchs were understood to embody: "They say they are not men and indeed they aren't; they want to pass as women, but whatever the nature of their bodies is, it tells a different story."[14]

In rejecting the view that John the Baptist was a eunuch, Jerome writes:

> "With your loins girt," Scripture says, and to the Apostles Christ gives the command: "Let your loins be girt about . . . " John [the Baptist], too, wore a leather girdle about his loins; and there was nothing soft or effeminate in Elijah either, but every bit of him was hard and virile (he certainly was a hairy man); he, too, is described as having worn a girdle of leather about his loins.[15]

Jerome asserts John's manliness by associating him with the "hard and virile" and "hairy" Elijah. The link asserts masculine virtues of courage, strength, public success, honor, and physical distinctiveness. Moreover, given that depilation, the removal of hair, by men was a "signifier of effeminacy," John's predilection for "camel hair" also constructs him as a manly man.[16]

Also contributing to John's masculinity is his preaching (1:7). Skilled public rhetoric was an expected role for elite men in Rome's world. Persuading others to one's point of view or to take a particular action was

13. Ibid., 267.

14. Ibid., 252.

15. Ibid., 270, citing Jerome, "De Exodo, in vigilia Paschae," Homily 91, "On the Exodus: The Vigil of Easter."

16. Craig A. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 139–44.

a means of exerting power over other men.[17] Amy Richlin explains that in rhetorical performances "manhood is contested, defended, defined, and indeed produced."[18] It is an activity from which women are largely excluded ("a woman orator was an anomaly") but in which the feminine is constantly threatening. Men performing public rhetoric poorly through bad style, content, and performance risked being unmanned or considered womanly.

John is not an elite man, but in his preaching John imitates and adopts an elite practice. And even as it asserts John's own masculinity, his preaching witnesses to the more powerful or greater man, Jesus (1:7). John declares Jesus' superior status as one who is more powerful or stronger than John, so much so in fact that John declares he is not worthy even to be a house slave who removes a guest's sandals and bathes their feet at dinner. This does not mean Jesus has high societal status; he does not. He is a carpenter (6:3). But he is the most powerful man in the story because God has chosen or anointed ("christed") him to be God's agent. John's comment, of course, attests some false modesty. While it witnesses to Jesus, it shows John worthy of being a witness in knowing his (subordinate) place.

Verse 8 differentiates the roles of John and Jesus. John submits himself to Jesus' greater work as baptizing not with water but with the Spirit. Some traditions understood an outpouring of the Spirit as a feature of the end times when God established God's empire/reign over all (Ezek 36:25-26; Joel 2:28-32). For Mark, the Spirit seems to denote God mystically present among people in Jesus' actions (see 1:9-12 below).

Just what is meant, though, by Jesus' baptizing with the Spirit (1:8) is not clear. The Gospel does not present a specific scene of Jesus baptizing with the Spirit, and the Holy Spirit plays a minor role in the Gospel after 1:9-12, being mentioned only at Mark 3:29; 12:36; 13:1. Perhaps the whole of Jesus' ministry is in view as a new era that manifests God's will and

17. Maud Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Gleason, "Elite Male Identity in the Roman Empire," in *Life, Death, and Entertainment in the Roman Empire*, ed. David S. Potter and David J. Mattingly (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 79–82; Joy Connolly, "Mastering Corruption: Constructions of Identity in Roman Oratory," in *Women and Slaves in Greco-Roman Culture: Differential Equations*, ed. Sandra R. Joshel and Sheila Murnaghan (London: Routledge, 1998), 130–51.

18. Amy Richlin, "Gender and Rhetoric: Producing Manhood in the Schools," in *Roman Eloquence: Rhetoric in Society and Literature*, ed. William J. Dominik (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 90–109.

purposes. Perhaps we are to understand that Jesus' ministry is the consequence of the Spirit coming into Jesus at his baptism (see 1:9-11 below).

The Gospel's claims of a new era created by Jesus' appearance intersect with claims made by various figures of another new era that began with the reign of the emperor Vespasian (69 CE). Vespasian's rule was understood to be instigated by the god Jupiter after the chaotic civil war (68–69 CE) and the defeat of the revolt in Judea (70 CE). The intersecting timelines of these two males, both claiming to begin new eras ("good news") and both proclaimed as sons of God, sets up a contest. In the Gospel's worldview, God's purposes win out over the Roman world, even if that is not especially evident in Rome.

## Jesus' Agency, Identity, Role (1:9-15)

Five male prophets—Isaiah, Moses, Malachi, Elijah, and John—have witnessed to Jesus' superior role, authority, and mission as the dominant male, the agent of God's purposes. How/When did Jesus become son of God? The baptismal scene provides the answer in terms of God's adoption of Jesus (1:9-11).

### *The Father Says So at Baptism (1:9-11)*

This scene presents a key revelatory moment of divine sanction for Jesus when God adopts him as "Son" at his baptism. It elaborates the declaration of 1:1. Central to the scene is the interaction between God and Jesus.

John baptizes Jesus in the river Jordan (1:9). The location of the Jordan river echoes the actions of Jesus' namesake Joshua, who, with divine assistance, led the people of Israel across the Jordan to take the divinely appointed land by divinely sanctioned military conquest (Josh 3:1-17). This account of male military power that dispossessed a people of its land is troubling. The Gospel evokes it, perhaps, to augment Jesus' prestige by association with Joshua since the name "Jesus" is the Greek form of the name "Joshua."

But further, evoking this past history involving the Jordan, Joshua, and God's gift of the land has significance for the audience of Mark's Gospel. When Mark's Gospel was written in the early 70s, the territory of Galilee (God's gift) was under Roman control, its land seized by the victorious Roman emperor Vespasian (Josephus, *J.W.* 4.120, 249; 6.339; 7.216–17). Evoking the Joshua-Jordan tradition enables the Gospel to suggest that

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