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WISDOM COMMENTARY

Volume 48

2 Corinthians

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General Editor



A Michael Glazier Book

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Panel from the Imperial Reliefs at the Sebasteion in Aphrodisias. Photograph by the New York University Excavation at Aphrodisias (G. Petruccioli) from the Faculty of Classics, University of Oxford.

Bas Relief of Saturnia or Tellus on the *Ara Pacis* in Rome, 9–13 CE. Photograph from Archivi Alinari, Firenze (Fratelli Alinari).

Abbreviations

3 Cor.	Third Corinthians (pseudonymous Pauline letter)
AB	Anchor Bible
AJ	<i>Antiquities of the Jews</i>
Ant.	<i>Jewish Antiquities</i>
ArBib	The Aramaic Bible
BCE	Before the Common Era
BDAG	Danker, Frederick W., Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000 (Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich)
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BHT	<i>Beiträge zur historischen Theologie</i>
BiBh	<i>Bible Bhashyam</i>
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation series
BibLeb	<i>Bibel und Leben</i>
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca sacra</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BTS	Biblical Tools and Studies
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>

BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CE	Common Era
Co	Corinthiens (French for Corinthians)
ESV	English Standard Version
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
FCNTECW	Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings
GBS	Guides to Biblical Scholarship
<i>Hist. Eccl.</i>	<i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i> (Eusebius' <i>History of the Christian Church</i>)
<i>Hor</i>	<i>Horizons</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IFT	Introductions in Feminist Theology
JB	Jerusalem Bible
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JOSTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement series
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KJV	King James Version
Kor	Korintherbrief (German for Corinthian letter)
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LXX	Septuagint (an early Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible)
NABRE	New American Bible Revised Edition
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible

<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum Supplements
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
REB	Revised English Bible
<i>RHPR</i>	<i>Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
SP	Sacra Pagina
<i>Spec. Leg.</i>	<i>De Specialibus Legibus</i> (Philo's <i>On the Special Laws</i>)
<i>ST</i>	<i>Studia Theologica</i>
Syms	Symposium Series
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>TZ</i>	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WD</i>	<i>Wort und Dienst</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>
<i>ZTK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

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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/men² 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*d³ 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*T⁵ 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, page xliii.

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 flourishing of human beings and all creation. 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. Berakot 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 speeches¹¹ 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 Newsom and Sharon 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 Schottruff 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 Encyclopaedia 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, 1984); 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 post-modern 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 Theologische Studien / 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

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

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).

the source of women's oppression, and some rejected its sacred origin 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 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.



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Author's Introduction

“Who Is Adequate for These Things?” (2 Cor 2:16)

A Feminist Commentary?

Commentaries are for people who want informed company when reading a difficult text.¹ A feminist commentary should provide feminist company, dealing especially with questions in the text that arise from women's experience and with challenges faced in a male-oriented world. So I take as my text above Paul's question in the Corinthian situation, "Who is adequate for these things?"² To be realistic, I am writing for the small group of people, women and men, who are preparing to teach or preach Paul's 2 Corinthians or who are curious for their own reasons and have sought out a feminist perspective. I assume that you look with your peers from the margin of social power for a fresh grasp of what is happening between Paul and these Corinthians and what might happen in our hearing of them today.

A feminist lens sharpens vision at three different ranges, and I will focus in each way as I look at Paul's letter. After the NRSV text and some words of introduction I begin each chapter with the broad focus favored by both science and philosophy. I ask what the text says about the reality of all bodies or beings in what we now call an ecosystem on this earth within a functioning universe—and here I do not exclude whatever these beings produce, including the speed of light, the webs of spiders, and

1. Gerhard Lohfink, "Kommentar als Gattung: Rudolf Schnackenburg zum 60. Geburtstag," *BibLeb* 15 (1974): 1–16.

2. Within my commentary, biblical translations are mostly my own.

the culture of humans, so the broadest focus includes the specific. This focus could be too broad for Paul's letters, blind as he seems to be about where food comes from, why families nurture children, or how water sustains life. Yet he grapples again and again with the limits of his body and the threat of death and finds in Jesus' dying and rising a way out of fear toward what he calls "a new creation." And Paul's upbringing in a largely Gentile world, yet with intense commitment to Israel's role, drives him to communicate to Gentiles his vision of a living Christ who can reconcile all people to God or he himself will utterly lose heart. Giorgio Agamben has named Paul's perceived location as "messianic time," the time that remains for waking up before the impending crisis.³ Claudia Janssen in her study of 1 Corinthians 15 names this as "body-time/Körper-Zeit," the time that is the moment of opportunity when bodies reach toward God's righteous presence.⁴

A woman's world in Greece of Paul's time involves long hours in procuring and preparing if not also raising food, fetching water, spinning thread, and making clothing. Women know the human body in its harsh constraints from threat of death at female birth (the ancient birth control method) and death in giving birth to death in poverty as widows. And the mourning rituals that follow all deaths are women's complaints. We do not need to identify this care of the body as essentially feminine to observe it at that time and in modified ways today as an education in this broad vision. We can ask: Is the identification of these Corinthians with Christ's death and raised life different from Paul's because of their sharper material lens? First Corinthians shows that they have gone from restricted lives to expressive living by participation in Christ, while Paul, who was born into significant rights as a free male Jew in a Greek-speaking city, has found himself in Christ multiply restricted.⁵ Yet 2 Corinthians suggests that the physical hardships of his itinerant existence may be showing Paul that their rising up in Christ is not a denial of Christ's death but the fruit that comes from it when their shared, if constricted, space and time open up to God's Spirit.

3. Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 59–78.

4. Claudia Janssen, *Anders ist die Schönheit der Körper: Paulus und die Auferstehung in 1 Kor 15* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus GmbH, 2005), 298–306.

5. Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990; repr. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 62–71, 159–76.

Second, we cannot make sense of this broad reality of life and death without focusing in on the specific social, political, and economic world in which it is occurring. For Paul's letters this is the world of Roman imperial rule based on centuries of military conquest, enslavement of resisting populations, efficient economic exploitation through provincial capitals such as Corinth, and a comprehensive ideological imprint in monumental art and the imperial cult. All of these structures functioned to the benefit of some at the expense of others, with almost all women falling in the serving, if not also the enslaved, populations. Two centuries earlier Rome had conquered and destroyed Corinth, then, after a century, "restored" it as a Roman colony on Greek soil. Here the Roman citizens held all administrative positions while local people worked on the land or in labor or trade, and at least a third of all residents were enslaved captives or their progeny. We see Paul expressing in his letters at least two different responses to Roman rule. The first is resistance. If God who raised Christ is the giver of all good, then all praise and glory belong to God, and this directly contests the emperor's claim to be the giver of peace and security. The second response to Rome is imitation, in that all of these claims for God and Christ are made in the language and reflect the power and patronage structures that dominate Roman Corinth. Whoever speaks in Corinth, including the one who reads Paul's letter aloud to its recipients, speaks in this double world and needs to be heard there.

Third, at a close-up range I focus on the letter as a move by Paul to accomplish something that is contested in a specific relationship. Paul writes not to assert timeless truths or to describe a historical situation but to persuade people in Corinth's new messianic sect of Israel and thereby to impact their relationship to him. So I read the letter as an argument provoked by a particular exigency. Questions about this exigency and Paul's stance in it, as far as it can be reconstructed from the argument, are feminist for a number of reasons. First, women and others in marginal social positions know that speaking is not neutral description but doing something that needs to be watched for its impact on us and, if necessary, contested. Second, though very few women were taught reading and writing skills, letters were composed and delivered orally, and women were active in the communities where letters were being heard and discussed. Yet the women in Corinth are not mentioned in 2 Corinthians, and this will not have escaped them. Third, Paul's rhetoric in this letter includes unusual cascades of images, pleas, threats, and caustic role plays that might particularly catch the ear of those whose speech often interrupts from the margin. So my ultimate focus is on the local

issue and the power dynamics at work in Paul's writing. I will conclude the analysis of each text with this close-up focus because I find in this interaction of Paul and the Corinthians not only the seed but also the fruit of my feminist exploration.

The three ranges for examining a text sketched above can also be distinguished methodologically. The broadest focus, used by most theologians, philosophers, and scientists, looks at the big picture. They want to know the underlying reality of their subject, considering it either in terms of its origins and ultimate ends (diachronically) or in terms of its structures and functions (synchronically). They are eclectic and speculative in method, proposing and testing theories that hold water in so far as they give a comprehensive explanation of their subject and the way it is known.

The mid-range focus on the political, economic, and social implications of the text applies what can be called a socio-historical method. It draws from all available literary and material remains contemporary with what is being studied to piece together the human activity of which the text is an integral part. Here recent methods developed by people marginalized in modern historical criticism are crucial to get an accurate reading—not only feminist criticism, but also the critique from oppressed racial, religious, and sexual groups and postcolonial nations.

Finally, the close-up focus on a particular interaction of a writer and those to whom a text is addressed employs rhetorical methods, methods most effective where the audience is specific, as in oral speaking and letter writing. My purpose is not to tag each move Paul makes with its appropriate title in ancient rhetorical handbooks but to track how Paul is speaking at each point to persuade others and what this tells in turn about those he wants to persuade. Because his arguments must gauge the perspectives of his interlocutors in order to seek certain responses from them, it is possible to make a tentative reconstruction of the interactions of Paul and the Corinthians in the period around this letter. I take particular interest in the perspectives and actions of women in Corinth's church who are a recurring object of Paul's attention in 1 Corinthians but are not singled out in 2 Corinthians. I ask: What happened to the Corinthian women prophets?

One Letter or Many?

Because of the sharp contrast in tone between Paul's attack in the last four chapters of 2 Corinthians and his encouragement in the framework of the early chapters, this letter has been read for over a century as a collection of several letters that Paul wrote. The dominant theory has been

that Paul first attacked his opponents in Corinth (chaps. 10–13) but was then able to achieve reconciliation (1:1–2:13; 7:5–9:15), having made, either before or after the attack, a strong defense of his apostleship (2:14–7:4). One short passage within the latter section is thought not to be written by Paul (6:14–7:1). Other interpreters have simply taken the clear break in tone after chapter 9 as a sign that time passed before Paul wrote the later chapters, and further news from Corinth or Paul's own reconsideration gave the letter(s) a sharpened ending. Recently, many interpreters have returned to taking the letter as a whole, not only because all manuscripts do so, but also because the disruptions within a document may be as important as its consistencies in understanding the situation in which it was written. To show the options for reading 2 Corinthians, I will describe one recent multiletter thesis, one interesting compromise position, and then list the major reasons why I will read the letter as a single communication, drawing on others who are doing so now.

Margaret M. Mitchell in a number of recent publications has explained 2 Corinthians as a series of five letters from Paul to Corinth.⁶ Though the five-letter thesis has been standard for a half-century,⁷ she has strengthened it in major ways. She proposes that Paul begins the sequence of letters by writing chapter 8 and ends it with chapter 9, two short letters promoting the collection for Jerusalem. In the first of these Paul reverses his promise made in 1 Corinthians 16:4 to allow Corinth's envoy to carry their own gift to Jerusalem, provoking suspicion that he is using the collection to feather his own nest. Paul then writes to defend his integrity as a servant of Christ (2 Cor 2:14–6:13; 7:2–4), and later, when a quick visit goes sour, he sends a sharp and ironic retort asserting his authority as an

6. Margaret M. Mitchell, "The Corinthian Correspondence and the Birth of Pauline Hermeneutics," in *Paul and the Corinthians: Studies of a Community in Conflict*, ed. Trevor J. Burke and J. Keith Elliott, NovTSup 109 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 20–36; Mitchell, "Paul's Letters to Corinth: The Interpretive Intertwining of Literary and Historical Reconstruction," in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Daniel N. Schowalter and Stephen J. Friesen (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 317–35.

7. For a history of partition theories, see Hans Dieter Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9: A Commentary on Two Administrative Letters of the Apostle Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 3–36. For proposals of how the pieces were edited together, see Günter Bornkamm's "The History of the Origin of the So-Called Second Letter to the Corinthians," *NTS* 8 (1962): 258–63; Andreas Lindemann, "' . . . an die Kirche in Korinth samt allen Heiligen in ganz Achaja': Zu Entstehung und Redaktion des '2. Korintherbriefes,'" in *Der zweite Korintherbrief: Literarische Gestalt—historische Situation—theologische Argumentation, Festschrift zum 70. Geburtstag von Dietrich-Alex Koch*, ed. Dieter Sänger (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2012), 131–59.

apostle (10:1–13:10). After hearing of their regret for offending him, he writes words moving toward reconciliation (1:1–2:13; 7:5–16; 13:11–13), and finally he sends the second collection letter (9:1–15), praising Achaia for their gift and challenging them to fulfill their pledges. In this way the two collection letters are no longer seen as addenda to three theological missives but become the framework for understanding that Paul’s whole effort in writing 2 Corinthians is to complete the collection.

It is significant that Mitchell does not get deflected into exploring the identity of the rival itinerants operating in Corinth but keeps her focus on the local believers. These are the ones Paul addresses. Having been educated in Greek, Paul was trained to contend with others, as is evident in the agonistic rhetoric with which he meets each response to his previous letter. By commenting on his own previous statements and the Corinthians’ responses to him he enters into the process of interpreting his letters that extends from their first hearers down through church history. At this point Mitchell’s focus shifts to the way that late antiquity interprets Paul. I only wish that, since his strategic use of every image and tradition was shaped to persuade a small circle in first-century Corinth, she did more to ferret out these people’s apparent stance and behavior, particularly that of the women among them. Yet her penchant to see Paul from the perspective of early Christian writers can help expose the limits of our modern ways of reading Paul. In the early Christian debate over whether Paul is a hard-nosed speaker of plain truths or a visionary of deep meanings, she eliminates neither option. She calls for the interpretive tool of a sliding “veil scale” from the clearest syllogism to the most veiled allusion to God’s perfect knowledge.⁸ No wonder someone in Corinth claimed that Paul’s gospel was veiled (4:3)—and provoked Paul’s retort comparing himself with Moses who veiled his face when he had seen God’s glory.

An intermediate position on 2 Corinthians assumes it was written in the present sequence but with significant time breaks, at least one before chapter 10 when collegiality suddenly gives way to vituperation.⁹ Margaret Thrall’s careful commentary notes that Titus and a brother have not yet arrived in Corinth when Paul writes 8:6 but are known there by

8. Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul, the Corinthians and the Birth of Christian Hermeneutics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 77.

9. Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, AB 32A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 30–55.

12:18.¹⁰ Others use the break before chapter 10 and Paul’s harsh rhetoric that follows as a basis for reversing the order of writing and calling the final chapters the “letter of tears” that Paul says he wrote to Corinth before Titus came back with news of Corinthian reconciliation (2:4; 7:6-7). David Trobisch has argued from a study of ancient letter collections that reordering of letters by an editor is highly unlikely, but he finds authors who join short letters into a single unit for further circulation.¹¹ He therefore proposes that Paul sent the Corinthians several letters before, during, and after traveling to Macedonia and then joined them himself for wider circulation in the order he wrote them, adjusting only at the seams. Yet would Paul who wrote letters so sharply and distinctively directed to each setting have reorganized letters for more general reading? The first hint of such circulation appears in the Colossians 4:16 note to have that letter read in the neighboring Laodicea, but it could indicate a specific problem common to both cities or a practice after Paul’s death.

This commentary will read 2 Corinthians as a single letter of Paul. I follow here a growing number of interpreters who find the partition theories unnecessary and the present format more simply attributed to Paul’s situation of writing than to a later editing.¹² I list here my primary

10. Margaret E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 3–49, specifically 19. Thrall’s commentary is often printed in two volumes but is paginated as one volume and will be so treated.

11. David Trobisch, *Die Entstehung der Paulusbriefsammlung: Studien zu den Anfängen christlicher Publizistik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 120, and more fully 90–97, 119–31.

12. For an early critical defense of literary unity, see Niels Hyldahl, “Die Frage nach der literarischen Einheit des Zweiten Korintherbriefes,” *ZNW* 64 (1973): 289–306. Others followed, including Frances Young and David F. Ford with *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians* (London: SPCK, 1987), 28–36; Bärbel Bosenius in *Die Abwesenheit des Apostels als theologisches Programm: Der zweite Korintherbrief als Beispiel für die Brieflichkeit der paulinische Theologie* (Tübingen: Franke, 1994), 97–107; Shelly Matthews, “2 Corinthians,” in *Searching the Scriptures*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, vol. 2 (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 198–201; and, in greatest detail, R. Bieringer in R. Bieringer and J. Lambrecht, *Studies on 2 Corinthians*, BETL 112 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994), 67–105 on partition theories, 107–79 on 2 Corinthians unity. Others who are now working with a unity hypothesis include the following: Jan Lambrecht, *Second Corinthians*, SP 8 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 7–11; Marlene Crüsemann, “2 Korintherbrief,” in *Bibel in gerechter Sprache*, ed. Ulrike Bail et al. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006), 2131–32; Crüsemann, *Gott ist Beziehung: Beiträge zur biblischen Rede von Gott*, ed. Claudia Janssen and Luise Schottroff (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2014), 184–85, 206–8; Crüsemann, *2 Corinthians* (Stuttgart:

reasons for this approach, at the same time recognizing that the case is not closed.

1. No manuscript gives evidence of multiple letters. This means any editing of fragments into the present letter must have been in the first century, with all originals lost well before 140 CE, when the letter was known by Marcion. If Trobisch's theory of the author editing his own work is uncharacteristic of Paul, the motivation for anyone else to put fragments together in this order seems even less probable.

2. The break in tone after Paul's call to collect for Jerusalem in chapters 8 and 9 and before his severe retorts in chapters 10–13 is not inexplicable. Günter Bornkamm gives examples of ancient letters that end with warnings when he argues this for the 2 Corinthians' editor's motivation to do so.¹³ How much more would it suit Paul, who has made himself vulnerable in intimate pleas (6:11-13; 7:2-16), to stress that he will not tolerate being dismissed when he comes to Corinth (10:1-6; 11:5-6; 13:1-3, 10). Once begun, this warning leads Paul to accuse the Corinthians of favoring others who call themselves apostles and to mock such people by taking on the persona of a fool (11:22–12:10).

3. When Paul's account of travel to Macedonia to find Titus in 2:12-13 is broken off and taken up again only in 7:5, the intervening confessional self-defense is often considered a separate letter fragment. It is more likely a digression evoked by the memory of Titus's good news (yet untold) that inspires Paul's expansive thanks to God (2:14-16) in spite of his own sense of inadequacy. This in turn provokes him to make an extended defense of his work among them (2:17–7:4). Though the length of this digression-turned-defense, like that of the final attack in chapters 10–13, has led to theories of several letters, Paul's prolixity is better seen

Kohlhammer, forthcoming); Ivan Vegge, *2 Corinthians: A Letter about Reconciliation; A Psychagogical, Epistologographical and Rhetorical Analysis*, WUNT 2.239 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 12–37; Thomas Schmeller, *Der zweite Brief an die Korinther*, Teilband 1: 2 Kor. 1:1–7:4 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2010), 19–40; Caroline Vander Stichele, "2 Corinthians," in *Feminist Biblical Interpretation: A Compendium of Critical Commentary*, ed. Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker, trans. Lisa Dahill et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012); Thomas Schmeller, "No Bridge over Troubled Water? The Gap between 2 Corinthians 1–9 and 10–13 Revisited," *JSNT* 36 (2013): 73–84; Udo Schnelle, "Der 2. Korintherbrief und die Mission gegen Paulus," in *Sänger, Zweite Korintherbrief*, 303–6, 318–20; Peter Arzt-Grabner, *2. Korinther. Unter Mitarbeit von Ruth E. Kritzer; Papyrologische Kommentare zum Neuen Testament 4* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 95–148; Christopher Land, *The Integrity of 2 Corinthians and Paul's Aggravating Absence* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2015).

13. Bornkamm, "History of the Origin," 258–63.

as a sign of the unusual pressure he feels himself under to recover good relations with this community.

4. Paul’s call to donate for Jerusalem in chapters 8 and 9—not misplaced, as partition theories claim—comes appropriately after he has pleaded for the Corinthians’ support (6:11-13; 7:2-4) and charged them to be devoted to God alone (6:14–7:1). Paul may share the prophets’ vision that, when the Gentiles are welcomed into Jerusalem with their offerings, then creation will be renewed as Jew and Greek together glorify God.¹⁴ Paul wants to meet physical needs in Jerusalem (Gal 2:10) and have Jerusalem believers accept the Gentiles he is converting (Rom 15:15-16), both within his ultimate purpose that all people glorify God, the giver of all good (2 Cor 9:11-15).

5. The sequence of events referred to in 2 Corinthians is most simply reconstructed by understanding that Titus, after bringing Paul good news in Macedonia, has already gone back to Corinth as Paul writes this letter (7:5-7; 8:6; 12:18).¹⁵ Paul is confident in Titus’s good reception in Corinth and may recognize that Titus can best renew the collection himself (12:17-18). Yet Paul plans to go to Corinth very soon and writes to argue that his own work is integral to the Corinthians’ faith and to the collection that Titus is making. Johannes Munck and now Marlene Crüsemann propose the following sequence for the letter: Paul deals first with the past issues in chapters 1–7, then supports the present collection in chapters 8–9, and finally prepares them for his future arrival in Corinth in chapters 10–13.¹⁶ Reimund Bieringer sees Paul praising the Corinthian assembly for their past dealing with a single offender in order to challenge them to be equally effective with the “false apostles” so that he need not discipline them when he comes.¹⁷

14. 2 Cor 9:11-12; Rom 11:25; 15:8, 15-16; Isa 66:18-23. A classic defense of this thesis was made by Johannes Munck in *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1959), 297–305. See also Keith F. Nickle, *The Collection: A Study in Paul’s Strategy* (Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1966). David J. Downs in *The Offering of the Gentiles* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 3–9, 140–65, denies there is sufficient evidence that Paul saw the collection as an eschatological event. Yet he acknowledges that Paul intended the collection not only to meet physical needs but to be a cultic offering uniting all people in returning to God the harvest of God’s benefaction (28–29)—something very similar.

15. The verbs about Titus’s sending are consistently in the aorist past tense, and only his positive feelings for Corinth are expressed in present tense.

16. Munck, *Paul*, 171; Crüsemann, “2 Korintherbrief,” 2131–32.

17. R. Bieringer, *Studies on 2 Corinthians*, 156–75.

2 Corinthians 5:11-21

A New Creation in Christ That Is Reconciliation

Text and Its Structure (5:11-21)

Here Paul brings his defense to a head. He begins, as before, in explicit self-defense that claims not to be self-defense (5:11-13; see also 3:1-2), attributes his confidence to Christ (5:14-17), attributes Christ to God (5:18-19), and concludes with a direct appeal to the Corinthians (5:20) and a summary statement (5:21). The conjunctions that Paul uses in this argument—*γὰρ* (“for,” 5:13, 14), *δὲ* (“but,” 5:18), and *ὡς ὅτι* (“that is,” 5:19)—trace his commission back to its source in Christ’s love and God’s reconciliation of the world, providing the backstory of Paul’s work in Corinth. Other conjunctions simultaneously point ahead to the purpose or consequences of these events—*ἵνα* (“so that,” 5:12, 15, 21), *ἄρα* (“therefore,” 5:14), *ὥστε* (“so,” 5:16, 17), and *ὁὖν* (“so that,” 5:20). God’s purpose, as the two summary statements show (5:15, 21), is that the living no longer live for themselves but for the dying and rising one and thereby take on God’s justice. Paul does not appear here as either the source or the aim of what he does. But by explaining the new creation in Christ as God’s act of reconciliation for the purpose of world transformation, Paul presents himself among others as God’s representative or instrument: “All this is from God who reconciled himself to us through Christ and has given us the delivery of reconciliation” (5:18).

2 Cor 5:11-21

^{5:11}Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we ourselves are well known to God, and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences. ¹²We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart. ¹³For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is

for you. ¹⁴For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. ¹⁵And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

¹⁶From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷So if anyone is in

A Feminist Lens at Three Ranges on Reconciling with God as a New Creation (5:11-21)

A Broad View of All Bodies Caught between Death and Life, Old and New

If we read the first half of this key passage with the broadest questions about the structure of existence—how life can overcome in spite of death and how anything fully new is possible when the old is so well entrenched—it helps to begin with the concrete words Paul uses to describe the struggle as he faces it. He insists that he and his coworkers are well known both to God and to the Corinthians (*πεφανερώμεθα*, “we are revealed, wide open, transparent”). They are known not by outward appearance (*πρὸς ὄψιν*, “by face”) but from within (*ἐν καρδίᾳ*, “in the heart”), and not when beside themselves (*ἐξέστημεν*, “we are ecstatic”) but in their right minds (*σωφρονοῦμεν*, “we make sense”). It is Christ’s love, Paul says, that constrains us (*συνέχει ἡμᾶς*, “holds, presses, or absorbs us”), “having determined that one died for all” (5:14). Dying for all in Paul’s world could be heard as a cultic sacrifice to atone for sin, or a martyr’s death to rescue a people. But these options do not fit the result that follows: “One died for all so all died.” Now Paul hardly makes sense, whatever he claims, since to die for someone would surely mean to save them from dying, not that they should also die.

Fortunately, Paul restates his point, “And he died for all so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for the one who died for them and was raised” (5:15). So Paul may be speaking metaphorically of a comprehensive change of orientation, from self-orientation to orientation on the one who died for all. Is that what he means by saying

Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God

is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

* NRSV notes: 5:16, Gk according to the flesh twice for from a human point of view; 5:19, Or God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.

that Christ was raised and that they are living? Though Christ's death was surely for Paul an event in past time (aorist tense), it was also more than that if it made possible for people to be transformed. A new structure of life is possible, Paul goes on to claim. "From now on we know nobody in terms of the flesh [*κατὰ σάρκα*, "from a human point of view" (NRSV); "by worldly standards" (NEB); "by what is external" (Moffatt)], not even Christ himself do we know this way" (5:16). And he celebrates: "So is anyone in Christ? It's a new creation! Everything old is gone! Look, everything has become new!" (5:17).

This raises two questions. First, can it be called a structural transformation if the positive life that comes out of death in Christ is presented only as a possibility for all rather than a completed fact? "He died for all so that those who live might no longer live for themselves. . . . If anyone is in Christ—a new creation!" (5:15, 17; see also Gal 6:15 and Rom 6:3-4). Earlier Paul put it in the future tense: "For just as all die in Adam, so also all will be made alive in Christ" (1 Cor 15:22). And how is the claim that life is given them by a single contemporary person demonstrated by the claim—to us even more improbable—that sin was given them by a single progenitor? Yet we can perhaps settle for Paul's point in our text that all died in one man's death, not by some external change in human nature, but by what the report of a death given for all can do to all, namely, that all die and become open to a life given for all.

This is where Paul introduces the crucial role of the reporters or news carriers, himself and his coworkers in many places (5:18-19). Paul sees the transformation already present in Jesus' death, even to the point that all die, but the new creation awaits the word of a messenger and the

response to it that realizes new life. This is the reason that Paul is intent on preaching and “carrying around in his body the dying of Jesus” (4:10), since he takes Jesus’ death to be the turning point that has already been accomplished, opening the way to new life for all in Christ.

The second question for us concerns the scope of this new creation that Paul is talking about. The apocalyptic tradition that Paul draws on proclaims a new creation of heaven and earth in the impending future. Comprehensive transformation is also suggested in Paul’s word choice. He announces a *καινή κτίσις* (new creation)¹ and speaks not only of new people but broadly of *τὰ ἀρχαῖα* and *καινά* (5:17; “old things and new things”; “everything old, everything new” [NRSV]). Within a year Paul will go on to write to Christ followers in Rome that the whole creation cries out in the process of its new birth as it moves from bondage to decay into the freedom and glory of God’s progeny (Rom 8:21-23). But to the Corinthians at this point he writes not so much of the process (as in 2 Cor 3:18) as of the present reality—the sheer surprise—of the new creation, accenting this in the clipped syntax of his three short exclamations: A new creation! Old things are gone! Look, new things are happening! (5:17).

So does this announcement of a new creation have eco-structural implications, or is he speaking strictly of the human condition? Paul’s focus is on human transformation, interpreters agree.² The “all” for whom Christ died who themselves die are *οἱ πάντες*, “all people.” Yet we must not be taken in by the modern bifurcation of humanity on the one side and nature on the opposite side. For Paul, surely, there is one God who creates all things (*τὰ πάντα*, 1 Cor 8:6), and in Romans he is explicit that even now “the whole creation [*πᾶσα ἡ κτίσις*] cries out in labor pains” to be released from its bondage to corruption (Rom 8:22-23). When Paul in 2 Corinthians proclaims a new creation in Christ (*ἐν Χριστῷ καινή κτίσις*) who dies for all people so that all die, he speaks of something that has implications beyond one species. The problem Paul has posed is death,

1. Though some have argued that *κτίσις* (“creation”) here must mean the human creature because the sentence begins “if anyone is in Christ,” Furnish counters on the basis of Romans 1:20, 25 and 8:19-22 that *κτίσις* means the whole creation, though he concedes it can be used to refer to a part of the creation (*τις κτίσις ἕτερά*, “any other creature,” Rom 8:39). See Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, AB 32A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 314–15.

2. Reimund Bieringer and Jan Lambrecht, *Studies on 2 Corinthians*, BETL 112 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994), 429–59; David G. Horrell, “Ecojustice in the Bible? Pauline Contributions to an Ecological Theology,” in *Bible and Justice: Ancient Texts, Modern Challenges*, ed. Matthew J. M. Coomber (London: Equinox, 2011), 164–72; Jan Lambrecht, *Second Corinthians*, SP 8 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 97.

not yet specifically sin,³ and a death that all living things share in a way far more integrated with each other than Paul may realize. David Horrell concludes that our awakening to the ecological crisis makes it possible for us to reread Paul constructively and carry further his grasp of God's whole creation and our human responsibility within it.⁴

A Mid-Range Focus on the Social, Political, and Economic Setting of Paul's Argument

Because Paul is speaking here of what has driven him and others to spread the news of Christ, the social context in which he works is not explicitly described. But the way he presents his message draws on the two major cultures he shares and betrays his social location within them—specifically in Greek-speaking Israel and in the Roman east. And because politics is the exercise of negotiating power in social relations and economics is the system of material production that supports this, each context suggests certain political and economic implications.

Israel is the dominant tradition from which Paul draws the concept of a “new creation,” particularly from its prophetic and apocalyptic voices, but also its wisdom traditions.⁵ Second Isaiah (Isa 40–55), known to Paul primarily through the Greek Old Testament (LXX), challenges the exiles of Judah that God is about to do a new thing and bring them through the desert back to their own land (see sidebar: “A New Thing Now”). And when the people become disillusioned Third Isaiah repeats “do not remember the former things” and extends the promise of God's creating from a new earth to new heavens and from a restored Jerusalem to “all flesh” (Isa 65:17–18, 21–22a; 66:22–23). Some apocalyptic writers have visions of a new communal future already prepared in heaven or a new

3. The noun “sin” (ἁμαρτία) appears only three times in 2 Corinthians: in 5:21 twice as he incorporates the broader tradition in his summary statement, and in 11:7. Also “world” is not a negative term in this letter as 5:19 shows, and “death” must carry the negative weight. On these terms, see Edward Adams' *Constructing the World: A Study of Paul's Cosmological Language* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 232–37.

4. Horrell, “Ecojustice,” 172–77; David G. Horrell, Cheryl Hunt, and Christopher Southgate, *Greening Paul: Reading Paul in a Time of Ecological Crisis* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 117–87.

5. On the background of Paul's understanding of a new creation, see the comprehensive study of Ulrich Mell, *Neue Schöpfung: Eine traditionsgeschichtliche und exegetische Studie zu einem soteriologischen Grundsatz paulinischer Theologie* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989); also Margaret E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 421–29.

heaven to come contrasted with the present earth.⁶ Paul retains this confidence in communal new life but sees it with Second Isaiah as already beginning in God's present transformation that is good news for all.

A New Thing Now

Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.

The wild animals will honor me,
the jackals and the ostriches;
for I give water in the wilderness,
rivers in the desert,
to give drink to my chosen people,
the people whom I formed for myself
so that they might declare my praise. (Isa 43:18-21)

In Paul's first-century context, before Israel's hopes for political agency are defeated in two revolts and the rabbis shift the focus onto family Torah obedience, there is still space to speak of a new creation in communal life that shapes all people. This kind of optimism also appears in diaspora Judaism's historical novel about Aseneth, the wife of Joseph mentioned in passing in Genesis 41:45.⁷ In this Hellenistic-Jewish historical novel she is an Egyptian priest's daughter who undergoes a radical conversion and, after seven days of repenting her idol worship in sackcloth and ashes, receives a heavenly visitor who announces her transformation. He renames her "City of Refuge" because many nations will take refuge in God through her. He gives her the honeycomb of life, saying, "Behold, you have eaten the bread of life and drunk a cup of immortality and been anointed with ointment of incorruptibility . . . and you shall be like a walled mother-city of all who take refuge with the

6. Jub. 1:29; Rev 21:1; 2 Pet 3:11-13; and see sidebar below, "A New Heaven and a New Earth," from 1 Enoch and *Biblical Antiquities*.

7. Mell, *Neue Schöpfung*, 226-57; for an extended version of the ancient text called "Joseph and Aseneth," see James H. Charlesworth, ed., *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983 and 1985), 2:202-47; for the shorter, probably earlier text in Greek and French, see Marc Philonenko, *Joseph et Aseneth* (Leiden: Brill, 1968); for further analysis, see Angela Standhartinger, *Das Frauenbild im Judentum der hellenistischen Zeit* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), and Ross Shepard Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph: A Late Antique Tale of the Biblical Patriarch and His Egyptian Wife, Reconsidered* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

name of the Lord God” (*Confession and Prayer of Aseneth* 16.16; see sidebar on pages 94–95). This story indicates that the social world of Israel that Paul shares is broader than its prophetic and apocalyptic voices and also produces popular wisdom traditions. As in Israel’s wisdom writings, Paul does not expect God’s new creation to wipe out God’s creation of this world but to make it over anew.

While the news that “one died for all, so all died” is indeed new in Israel, Paul makes sense of it within the experiences and expectations of his people.⁸ Immediately after exclaiming about the new creation, he announces twice that it is all God’s doing (5:18, 19). And to make clear that this is no new god but the same Creator and Rescuer who has challenged Israel from the start, he incorporates an early tradition, “not counting their offenses against them” (5:19), and ends with a summary that explains the power of Jesus’ death to make life in terms of an exchange of sin for righteousness.⁹ Paul may be the first to call life in Christ a “new creation,” as several interpreters suggest,¹⁰ but the phrase simply shows that these early Christ communities were a part—if a marginal one—of diaspora Second Temple Judaism where God’s “new heaven and new earth” was anticipated (see sidebar: “A New Heaven and a New Earth”).

A New Heaven and a New Earth

But when the years appointed for the world have been fulfilled, then the light will cease and the darkness will fade away. And I will bring the dead to life and raise up those who are sleeping from the earth . . . so that I may render to each according to his works. . . .

And the world will cease, and death will be abolished and hell will shut its mouth. And the earth will not be without progeny or sterile for those inhabiting it; and no one who has been pardoned by me will be tainted. And there will be another earth and another heaven, an everlasting dwelling

8. Thrall offers six options for reading “all died” and herself thinks Paul understands it parallel to universal sin in Adam (*Second Epistle*, 409–11).

9. Ernst Käsemann proposed that with 5:19-21 Paul was quoting Christian tradition, due to such matters as the opening $\omega\varsigma\ \delta\tau\iota$ that can be translated “as it is said,” the plural word for sins while Paul prefers the singular, and the periphrastic verb unusual for Paul (“Some Thoughts on the ‘Doctrine of Reconciliation,’” in *The Future of Our Religious Past*, ed. J. M. Robinson [New York: Harper and Row, 1971], 52–57). Others reduce the quote to 19ab (Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 334–35), and Thrall considers traditional allusions are more likely (Thrall, *Second Epistle*, 445–49).

10. Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 314–15; Thrall, *Second Epistle*, 424–29.

place¹¹ (*Biblical Antiquities* 3.10).

There shall be the eternal judgment; and it shall be executed by the angels of the eternal heaven—the great (judgment) which emanates

from all of the angels. The first heaven shall depart and pass away; a new heaven shall appear; and all the powers of heaven shall shine forever sevenfold. (1 Enoch 91.16)¹²

Distinctive to Paul in this context is his proclamation that the anticipated new world is already accomplished in Christ's death for all, so that all have died, even, it seems, those not yet knowing this. All that is lacking is that people receive the news, and this, Paul completes his argument, is the task of those who have heard, specifically himself and his coworkers. That the repenting Gentile is welcome is nothing new in Israel. The proselyte is the one called a new creation in the rabbis' writings, as with Aseneth. But now "one died for all so all died," Jews included, and Paul is ready to take the role of messenger, "carrying around Jesus' dying in the body" (4:10), and, it seems, ready to recognize the consequent appearance of Jesus' life in the Corinthians.

Politically, this means that the most important power negotiations for Paul are those within the people of Israel, and specifically among the "saints," as he calls those in Christ. But can he amass sufficient evidence that God transforms all through the death of Jesus to convince God's people Israel that Christ's life has power through those who tell and exhibit his death? This letter aims more modestly to persuade Christ believers in Corinth of this. By affirming their life in Christ, he claims recognition of Christ's death in him and thereby of God's reconciliation of the world through those who have been reconciled. Yet his accompanying economic agenda appears to threaten his success in Corinth. He is collecting funds for the poor in Jerusalem, which could reconcile Christ believers there with Paul's mission, and at the same time he is refusing in Corinth personal gifts for his own support that would make him dependent on them. Though Paul's aims are more explicit in other chapters, in this letter, where he defends his plans, Titus's mission, and the collection, his "one died for all so all died" followed by "all this is from God" identify the event of Christ's death and its universal significance as God's action to be foundational for Israel's political and economic life.

11. *Pseudo-Philo/Biblical Antiquities* 3.10, trans. Daniel J. Harrington, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:307.

12. 1 En. 91.16, trans. E. Isaac, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:73.

The imperial political context surfaces in 2 Corinthians 5:11-21 at three points at least: in Paul's universal claims of a "new creation," in his naming God's act in Christ "reconciliation," and in his calling himself "envoy" or "ambassador." In each case Paul uses arguments on behalf of Christ that are current in Roman defense of its power.¹³ Although there is no alternative to speaking in the language and cultural concepts of one's time, the question arises whether Paul has been coopted by imperial thinking or whether he successfully destabilizes the imperial way of making these power claims so as to offer a distinct, or even contrary, grasp of what effective power is.

In this text it is particularly his announcement of a new creation in Christ that parallels the claim of a new age for all peoples that was made on behalf of Rome's emperors. In monumental art, inscriptions, literature, and coins, Augustus Caesar (31 BCE–14 CE) was heralded everywhere as the sign of a new world order, all the more after his death when succeeding emperors traced their authority to *Divus Augustus* (divine Augustus). In 9 BCE the cities of Asia Minor announced the "good news" of a new age that had begun from his birthday (see sidebar: "Proclamation of Augustus's Birthday"), and Virgil's Fourth Eclogue was sung to herald Augustus's arrival as the golden age.¹⁴ Augustan propaganda often downplayed Roman military domination and highlighted the peace, prosperity, and good order of all people under his care (see figure 1, Earth Goddess bas relief at the *Ara Pacis* [Altar of Peace]).¹⁵ The character of the "new creation" that Paul proclaims may be closer to the visions of Israel's apocalyptic seers and wisdom teachers,¹⁶ but its present arrival provoking shouts of universal celebration is closer to the sound of Roman crowds welcoming the emperor or to the good news of his birthday decreed by provincial assemblies.

13. T. Ryan Jackson, *New Creation in Paul's Letters: A Study in the Historical and Social Setting of a Pauline Concept*, WUNT 2.272 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 60–80, 115–49; J. Albert Harrill, *Paul the Apostle: His Life and Legacy in Their Roman Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 76–94.

14. *Documents and Images for the Study of Paul*, ed. Neil Elliott and Mark Reasoner (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 110–11; *Eclogues. Aeneid: Books 1–6*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, rev. G. P. Gould, Virgil, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916).

15. On the altar built by Augustus the life-size relief carving of the Goddess of Peace or Mother Earth is surrounded by infants and animals signifying fertility, peace, and prosperity. See the illustration on the next page. Yet on the opposite side of the altar there seems to be a surviving fragment of the Goddess Roma in military regalia (Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988], pp. 120–23, 167–79, figs. 126, 135, 136).

16. See the thorough history of these new creation traditions in Ulrich Mell's *Neue Schöpfung*.



Figure 1. The Earth Mother Tellus or the Goddess of Peace in a garden with nursing babies and grazing animals, flanked by the *aurae*, winds blowing rain on the land (left) and transport on the sea (right). The upper left panel bas relief at the entrance of the *Ara Pacis* in Rome, constructed in 9–13 CE to honor victories of Augustus Caesar. Alinari Archive, Florence.

*Proclamation of Augustus's
Birthday as the Gospel
of a New Era*

Whereas the Providence (πρόνοια) which has guided our whole existence and which has shown such care and liberality has brought our life to the peak of perfection in giving to us [the emperor] Augustus, whom it filled with virtue (ἀρετή) for the welfare of humanity, and who, being sent to us and to our descendants as a savior (σωτήρ), has put an end to war and has set all things in order;
and [whereas], having become

manifest, Caesar has fulfilled all the hopes of earlier times . . . not only in surpassing all the benefactors (εὐεργέται) who preceded him but also in leaving to his successors no hope of surpassing him;

and whereas, finally, that the birthday of the God [Augustus] has been for the whole world the beginning of the good news/ gospel (εὐαγγέλιον) concerning him,

[therefore, let a new era begin from his birth, and let his birthday mark the beginning of the new year].¹⁷

Yet it is Christ's love expressed in his "death for all" that is distinctive in Paul's particular expression of a new creation (5:14). Although the cross, which was the means of Roman execution, is not stressed in 2 Corinthians as it is in Galatians and 1 Corinthians, death for others is explicit and may signify for Paul, as in Jewish martyrdom stories, a witness in face of occupying foreign rulers.¹⁸ We cannot dismiss the political implications in Paul's claim of Christ's death for all by making a narrow cultic interpretation in terms of atonement for sin before God. In fact, Paul completes "one died for all" with "all died," not with "so others would not die." Christ's death evokes the believer's own death to self and life "for the one who died and was raised" (5:14-15), accomplishing not substitution but participation or representation.¹⁹ And when Paul goes on to say that this new creation in Christ's death and rising

17. Priene Inscription, 9 BCE in *Ancient Roman Religion*, ed. and trans. F. C. Grant (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1957), 174, followed by other examples. The Priene inscription is also cited in David R. Cartlidge and David L. Dungan, *Documents for the Study of the Gospels* (Cleveland: Collins, 1989), 13-14.

18. 2 Macc 6-7; 4 Macc 4:15-12:19; 17:17-22.

19. A. J. M. Wedderburn, "2 Cor 5:14—A Key to Paul's Soteriology," in *Paul and the Corinthians: Studies of a Community in Conflict*, ed. Trevor J. Burke and J. Keith Elliott, NovTSup 109 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 267-83; Michael J. Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 247-49; Mell, *Neue Schöpfung*, 342-63.



Figure 2. The emperor, center, crowned by Senate or Goddess Roma, is holding the victory trophy over a conquered suppliant. One panel of the Sebasteion, a double stoa honoring the emperors in the Asia Minor city of Aphrodisias. New York University Excavation at Aphrodisias (G. Petruccioli).

is “from God” who is “reconciling the world to himself” (5:18-19), the claim of transformation in Christ is made universal. Though not directly contrasted with imperial claims, it cannot be made compatible with them. The emerging conflict with what becomes in Paul’s century the cult of emperor worship is more sharply framed in the later letters of Colossians and Ephesians and is explicit, if in visionary language, in Revelation.²⁰

In addition to a universal claim, Paul adopts in his reconciliation metaphor an image of the world at enmity with its rightful ruler. On Roman-era coins and bas reliefs we see conquered “barbarians” on their knees before the emperor, pleading for mercy and reconciliation (see figure 2, Emperor crowned by Roman Senate or the Goddess Roma with captive kneeling). In exceptional cases the emperor might favor with clemency some who had fought against Roman legions in order to display his magnanimity. When Paul uses the term *καταλλάσσω* (reconcile) for what God does in Christ, he could be comparing it to a family conflict that is overcome (see 1 Cor 7:11), but he more likely draws on the image of warfare that is overcome in peace, as he does later in Romans 5:10: “If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his son, how much more will we who are reconciled be saved in his life.” Some interpreters propose that Paul is influenced by Hellenistic Jewish texts that speak of God finally becoming reconciled with his people.²¹ What is clear is that Paul reverses the standard expectation, also among Jews, that the offending party sends envoys to sue for peace. Paul announces that it is God, the rightful ruler, who sends envoys to seek reconciliation with an alienated creation.²² So the highest virtue of the emperor to grant clemency to enemies who sue for peace is superseded by Paul’s God who offers reconciliation to those who have never claimed it.

For Paul, all that is lacking to realize new life is news of this event, and here he draws on practices of Hellenistic and Roman diplomacy. Envoys are sent representing the ruler to inform people of the conditions for peace. Paul presents those who have been reconciled with God—himself

20. Col 1:15-20; Eph 1:20-23; Rev 13:1-18; 18:1-19:10.

21. 2 Macc 7:33; 8:29; Thrall, *Second Epistle*, 429–30; Cilliers Breytenbach, *Grace, Reconciliation, Concord: The Death of Christ in Graeco-Roman Metaphors* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 177.

22. Breytenbach, *Grace, Reconciliation, Concord*, 171–205; John T. Fitzgerald, “Paul and Paradigm Shifts: Reconciliation and Its Linkage Groups,” in *Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide*, ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 241–62.

and his coworkers—as ambassadors or envoys of God’s unconditional reconciliation of the world (5:18-19). Because the Greek verb Paul uses for their task, *πρεσβεύομαι* (“I act as elder,” “I represent”), appears in nominal form in some inscriptions for the Latin term *legatus*—a representative appointed by the emperor with full authority to carry out a specific, usually military, task²³—Margaret Thrall concludes that this “image enhances the dignity of the apostolic office.”²⁴ And Margaret Mitchell notes that Paul begins as a prisoner in God’s triumph and ends in “a traveling parade of Christ’s ambassador.”²⁵ But *πρεσβεύομαι* is a broad term for an appointed representative or envoy, and Paul uses it as a verb and in the plural, not just for himself or in any relation to his being an apostle. In contrast to the English noun “ambassador,” which implies at least in the United States a single figurehead for one nation located in another nation, this verb signifies representation for any specific task. Granted that Paul is claiming a certain authority by using this term from Greco-Roman diplomatic practice, he claims it as a responsibility of those who have been reconciled to carry the message of God’s reconciliation (5:18-20).

So in at least these three ways—the universal claim, the image of military reconciliation, and the role of representative or ambassador—Paul uses language and concepts with which the Roman Empire claims power in order to defend his claims, while in each case distinguishing the power he defends from theirs. A new creation has come for all people, not through Rome’s might or for an inner circle of the empire, but through Christ’s death. Reconciliation with the world ruler has come, not by the pleas of captives begging for the emperor’s clemency, but by God’s initiative to reconcile the world to God’s self in Christ’s faithfulness that leads to his death. The ambassadors or, better, representatives who have been given authority to carry the news are not from the senatorial ranks but from those who themselves have been reconciled, whose witness makes their word believable. Nevertheless, because Roman power permeates first-century Corinth—refounded as a Roman colony by Julius Caesar and functioning as Rome’s provincial

23. G. Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910), 379, citing David Magie, *De Romanorum iuris publici* (Leipzig: Tuebner, 1905), 86–89.

24. Thrall, *Second Epistle*, 437.

25. Margaret M. Mitchell, “The Corinthian Correspondence and the Birth of Pauline Hermeneutics,” in Burke and Elliott, *Paul and the Corinthians*, 29–30.

capital of Achaëa with Roman city government and Roman monumental construction—Paul’s power claims may be heard and his countercultural qualifications missed, all the more so because Paul’s defense requires that he assert himself.

*A Close-up of Paul’s Interaction with the Corinthians,
Especially the Women*

Aware of Paul’s systemic claims and his social-political setting above, I focus on Paul’s argument as one stage in his interaction with a particular group in Corinth, which is known in other documents to contend for wisdom and to include active women.²⁶ How does the way Paul tries to persuade these people also show us something of their previous approaches to him, their probable reactions to this argument, and his possible responses in turn?²⁷ Though a narrow view of proof excludes such proposals about a document as speculative, in the case of a letter the specific address is a given, and the letter’s meaning cannot be understood without making assumptions, articulated or not, about the human interaction within which its writing takes place. Due to the importance of this passage in Paul’s 2 Corinthians argument, I will take up each of its four units in turn, following my own translation.

So knowing we are accountable to the Lord we do persuade people, but we are transparent to God, and I trust also transparent to your consciences. It is not that we are commending ourselves to you again, but we are giving you a starting point for taking pride in us, so that

26. 1 Cor 1:17-31; 7; 11:2-16; 14:26-37; 1 Clement 11–12; 21; 44–49; 54–56.

27. See here Christine Gerber’s caution that the letter must be read as an argument shaped for a single situation not our own (*Paulus, Apostolat und Autorität, oder vom Lesen fremder Briefe* [Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2012], 9–18), and Melanie Johnson DeBaufre and Laura S. Nasrallah’s aim to read Paul’s letters as “sites of vision and debate” and contested space by “privileging the ancient communities to which Paul wrote” (“Beyond the Heroic Paul: Toward a Feminist Decolonizing Approach to the Letters of Paul,” in *The Colonized Apostle: Paul through Postcolonial Eyes*, ed. Christopher Stanley [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011], 161–74). Bieringer analyzes at length the relation between Paul and the Corinthians as Paul sees it, but he does not ask how the Corinthians might see it (*Studies on 2 Corinthians*, 173–79, 197–226, 246–51). Hans Frör does provide in detail the responses of various Corinthians to Paul, though sometimes taking Paul’s critiques of them as objective characterizations (*You Wretched Corinthians! The Correspondence between the Church in Corinth and Paul* [London: SCM, 1995]).

you can deal with those who take pride in appearances and not in the heart. As for us, if we were out of our minds, it was for God, but if we are in our right minds, it is for you. (5:11-13)

As after each time Paul affirms in this letter what God is doing, he returns here again to defending himself. Since he and his coworkers are accountable to Christ's judgment for whatever they do (5:10), they know they are transparent to God and, Paul trusts, also to the Corinthians.²⁸ On this basis they have been bold to persuade people, though some might consider this presumptuous (Gal 1:10). And if it sounds like they make too much of themselves, Paul claims he does this only to show the Corinthians how to defend him and his colleagues against people who boast in the way they look and not in who they are. If this is a defense against Corinthian charges, they do find him presumptuous rather than inspiring, but he insists on reserving his ecstasies for times with God (5:13; 1 Cor 14:18-19) and on claiming authority from the news he carries rather than from his transforming experiences—though not denying he has them (2 Cor 12:1-10). Paul does not identify which factions in Corinth hold these views or whether women are leaders among those who do. But the fact that Paul's effort in 1 Corinthians to restrict women occurs at the beginning and at the climax of his reining in expressive conduct in worship (1 Cor 11:2-16; 14:34-35) suggests that he could be responding here to their continuing activity of this kind. In any case he is no longer laying down restrictions on them but has recognized his own vulnerability and defends himself as being down-to-earth and in his right mind among them.

For Christ's love constrains us, since we have judged that one died for all so all died. And he died for all so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for the one who died for them and was raised. So from now on we ourselves know nobody according to the flesh. Even if we knew Christ according to the flesh, we know him this

28. Ἐπιζῶ (I hope) signifies for Paul not an anxious longing, as we often use the term, but a steady confidence, hence my translation "trust." (See Scott J. Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel: The Letter/Spirit Contrast and the Argument from Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3* [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1995], 337.) Paul understands the *συνείδησις* (conscience) as a positive moral compass in human nature that functions for Gentiles parallel to the law for those in Israel (Rom 2:15; 13:5) (Margaret E. Thrall, "The Pauline Use of ΣΥΝΕΙΔΗΣΙΣ," *NTS* 14 [1967]: 118–25; *Second Epistle*, 131–33).

way no longer. So if anyone is in Christ—a new creation! What’s old is gone—look, what’s new has come! (5:14-17)

Paul here shifts out of the direct address of “we” speaking to “you” and begins to speak as “we” concerning “all” and finally “anyone.” This paragraph gives us an explanation (γὰρ, for; 5:14) of why Paul persists in persuading people (5:11), namely, because he is constrained to do so by the love of Christ. Interpreters agree that Paul means Christ’s love for all rather than Paul’s love for Christ. Yet if Paul is constrained by Christ’s love, it also motivates him.²⁹ Would some in Corinth prefer him to let up and leave space for other persons or interpretations? His own judgment about what happened is radical—that “one died for all so all died,” a categorical impact on humanity later explained by Paul as God’s way of overcoming sin (Rom 5:5–6:11). But here Paul speaks in terms that may be of greater concern to Corinth: death or life, shame or glory. The failure or death that one person experienced for all others was a failure or death of all people. None escape. This is presented as an accomplished fact, whether Paul conceives the death of all as a natural death³⁰ due to being implicated in violence since Adam or a metaphorical death of the self-oriented and destructive personal or communal identity. It follows that all people, including Christ, no longer are to be known “in terms of the flesh” (5:16), which may mean according to earthly descent, or judging by externals, or living for oneself and being vulnerable to failure (5:16). Those who no longer live for themselves are “in Christ,” since the death that comes by all participating in Christ’s death has allowed a new life in God’s raising Christ from the dead.

It has been proposed that Paul may have been the first to identify life in Christ as the new creation that was anticipated in the prophets and in apocalyptic Judaism.³¹ His exclamation here does sound like a discovery: “If anyone is in Christ—a new creation! What’s old has gone. Look,

29. The verb *συνέχω* is normally restrictive: “hold together,” “constrain.” Yet Bouttier argues following Deissmann that Paul’s “love of Christ” means not only Christ’s love of all but also a responding human love of Christ and others (a simultaneous subjective and objective genitive), so that life “in Christ” can be characterized as “Christusliebe” (Christ-love) and functions to motivate as well as constrain (Michel Bouttier, *En Christ, Étude d’exégèse et de théologie pauliniennes* [Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962], 69–73; Adolf Diessmann, *Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History*, from the German 2nd ed. 1925 [New York: Harper Brothers, 1957], 161–64).

30. See James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 210–11.

31. Isa 42:5-16; 43:18-21; Ezek 36:26-30.

what's new has come!" (5:17). Yet what is unique to Paul may rather be its universal prerequisite that was accomplished in Christ's death—"and all died." It is possible that claims of a new creation in Christ were already present in the Corinthian community. They knew through Paul the tradition of a new covenant in Christ's blood (1 Cor 11:25), and they were the ones Paul once mocked, "Already you have eaten your fill! Already you are rich! Without us you have become kings!" (1 Cor 4:8). But Christ's death was not prominent in their claims, either as the prime evidence of Christ's love or as the turning point of human transformation. In contrast Paul wrote of his work in Corinth, "I decided to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2).

If the Corinthians already claimed transformation, even possibly "a new creation," in Christ's living presence, then Paul is here conceding the transformation they claim, celebrating it even, yet in a way bound firmly to and rising out of the death that Christ "died for all, so all died" (2 Cor 5:14). In order to defend his own and his coworkers' mission of "carrying around in the body the dying of Jesus" (2 Cor 4:10), he affirms that the life of Christ is becoming visible in this mission, particularly in the Corinthians, its flower: "So death is a work in us, but life in you" (4:12); "You are our letter [of recommendation]" (3:2). I suggest that this might have opened up a channel of communication between Paul and the Corinthians, if they could make sense of his conviction that they participate through him in Christ's death where "all died" and if he could sustain his openness to their creative expressions of the resulting "new creation."

And all this is from God who has reconciled us to God's self through Christ and has given us the task of delivering reconciliation. That is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to God's self, not counting their offenses against them, and placing in us the news of reconciliation. (5:18-19)

Here Paul's argument comes to a head in two ways that reveal the interchange between him and the Corinthians. First, he coins the term "reconciliation" as a way to speak of God's work in Christ, and he does this out of his own experience of alienation from the Corinthians. Second, he exposes the breadth of his first-person plural speech to include them as both reconciled and reconcilers. How do these either respond to the Corinthians or provoke their response to him?

First, these two verses, which are one sentence in Greek, apparently describe for the first time the saving act of God in Christ as a reconciling

of the alienated. Most verbs Paul uses to describe what God does in Christ appear in earlier and broader traditions about Christ—to save, redeem, justify, sanctify. But for God to take the initiative to reconcile God’s self with people appears in the New Testament only here and soon after in Paul’s Romans 5:10-11 and 11:15. Yet a number of interpreters contend that God’s reconciling the world cannot be Paul’s new coinage because he immediately refers to God’s not counting offenses in a way unusual for him that suggests he is quoting Christian preaching.³² Yet he may be quoting only a few words. In fact, Paul’s constant melding of tradition and innovation points to him adopting here a phrase about sins not being counted to tie his image of reconciling in with other more cultic interpretations of Christ. Most interesting, the appearance of reconciliation language at just this point in Paul’s letters suggests that it is Paul’s extended alienation from the Corinthians and his deep desire for reconciliation with them that has made him sensitive to the reconciling aspect of what God does in Christ.³³ Breytenbach says that Paul’s own appeals for reconciliation with the Corinthians in 6:11-12 and 7:2-4 constitute “the real point of the apostle’s earlier exhortation to be reconciled to God.”

Second, Christ’s dying and rising are identified as “from God who has reconciled us” so as to make “us” participants not only in Christ’s death and life but also in the act of reconciliation that God is doing. This sentence exposes the broadest extent of Paul’s first-person plural speech. Its first half must include the Corinthians in Paul’s “to us”; indeed all people are potentially included according to his just previous “one died for all so all died” (5:14). It follows that the second half of the same sentence about God’s having given “us” the task of reconciliation describes not only Paul and his colleagues but all who are reconciled being given the delivery of reconciliation. Interpreters agree that Paul’s “us” for the reconciled includes the Corinthians, but they differ about whether Paul takes them to be reconcilers. Robin Griffith-Jones says that the Corinthians would never understand this to include themselves. Margaret Thrall says the

32. See note 9 above.

33. Fitzgerald, “Paul and Paradigm Shifts,” 257; also Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 334–37; Lambrecht, *Second Corinthians*, 104–6; J.-F. Collange, *Énigmes de la Deuxième épître de Paul aux Corinthiens: Étude exégétique de 2 Cor. 2:14–7:4* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 269, 273–75, 280; Gerber, *Apostolat und Autorität*, 74–75; Thrall, *Second Epistle*, 438; Riita Särkiö, “Die Versöhnung mit Gott—und mit Paulus: Zur Bedeutung der Gemeindesituation in Korinth für 2 Kor 5,14-21,” *ST* 52 (1998): 33–34; Breytenbach, *Grace, Reconciliation, Concord*, 174–75.

Corinthians and all believers are included in the reconciled but not in the reconcilers. J.-F. Collange says the plural reference in both clauses must be kept open—Paul and the Corinthians are taken both as reconciled and reconcilers, but the Corinthians are emphasized in Paul’s first point and he in the second. And Victor Furnish and Walter Rebell insist that Paul’s plural pronoun be read consistently so that all reconciled become reconcilers.³⁴ I take Paul’s point here to be that the new creation in Christ is God’s doing, both “our” reconciliation and “our” having the task of reconciling. Spoken by Paul to the Corinthians, this challenges them to see each other both receiving and transmitting what God is doing.

It is Paul’s next sentence that begins to distinguish roles as he broadens the scope of God’s reconciling in Christ to “the world” and focuses on messengers such as Timothy, Silas, and himself in whom God has placed the *λόγος* (word, news) of reconciliation. Here I sense Paul is shifting back to defending the work he and his colleagues have been doing. Unlike in 1 Corinthians where Paul tried to shape the Corinthians’ understanding of how to participate in Christ, here in 2 Corinthians he does not develop further their place as reconcilers but returns to persuading them of his necessary place in their new creation in Christ. It is not that he ignores them but that he recognizes what they want from him is not instruction but recognition, and within that he wants to show them how he fits in to their positive experience of Christ.

The question not broached by interpreters is what God’s reconciling the world might have meant to the Corinthians, whether their alienation from Paul also disturbed them or whether they took his appeal for reconciliation as Paul’s effort to regain authority over them. In what might be seen as a parallel move to Paul’s, the United Presbyterian Church of the United States of America, in writing the Confession of 1967, chose to express its faith in terms of God’s reconciliation in Christ because its leaders were struggling with the alienation between races and regions in the United States. Fifteen years later this confession was criticized because it assumed that the alienated wanted reconciliation in Christ

34. Robin Griffith-Jones, “Turning to the Lord: Vision, Transformation and Paul’s Agenda in 2 Corinthians 1–8,” in *Theologizing in the Corinthians Conflict: Studies in the Exegesis and Theology of 2 Corinthians*, ed. Reimund Bieringer, Ma. Marilou S. Ibita, Dominika A. Kurek-Chomycz, and Thomas A. Vollmer, BTS 16 (Leuven: Peeters, 2013) 276–79; Thrall, *Second Epistle*, 430–31; Collange, *Énigmes*, 268–69 and 269 n.1; Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 317; Walter Rebell, *Gehorsam und Unabhängigkeit. Eine sozialpsychologische Studie zu Paulus* (Münich: Christian Kaiser, 1986), 64–66.

when it was liberation they wanted.³⁵ The very fact that Paul feels himself alienated from the Corinthians and seeks their positive response suggests that they do not share his sentiment. Yet because Paul seeks reconciliation and depicts God seeking reconciliation, he must offer in exchange something that the Corinthians do want, namely, the recognition that they are not simply receivers of the good that God gives but, like Paul and his colleagues, are also channels of God's gifts and transmitters of the news of reconciliation in an alienated world.

Therefore we are representatives on Christ's behalf as God makes the appeal through us. We plead on Christ's behalf, "Be reconciled to God!" The one who did not know sin God made sin for our sakes, so that we might embody God's justice in him. (5:20-21)

It may be in response to Corinthian doubts about reconciliation with him that Paul returns to focus on his role among them. He expresses it in a first-person plural verb, *προεβέβουμεν*, literally, "we act as elders or representatives,"³⁶ sent by God to speak for Christ. And here Paul simultaneously explains what he does and does what he explains by challenging them, "Be reconciled to God." Reimund Bieringer argues that the verb here should be read as a deponent with a reflexive meaning, "Reconcile yourselves to God," calling for human participation in this act.³⁷ Margaret Thrall is doubtful that Paul means a mutual reconciliation of humans and God. Yet all agree that Paul is not only telling what he would say to unbelievers but appealing directly to the Corinthians themselves, and the imperative does call for their response. Paul's aim, Jan Lambrecht says, is their renewed reconciliation with God. This is the first imperative verb in a letter with few imperatives, and in this context it is better called an appeal than a command. It shows that there is still alienation and that Paul is approaching the Corinthians cautiously by making the first direct appeal after five chapters.

The final sentence (5:21) reads as an appendage or perhaps a summary, but it also works to include the Corinthians again in Paul's first-person

35. "Reconciliation and Liberation—The Confession of 1967," special issue of the *Journal of Presbyterian History* 61 (1983).

36. See the previous section on the political and social context of this text for discussion of the translation "we are ambassadors."

37. Reimund Bieringer, "'Reconcile Yourselves to God': An Unusual Interpretation of 2 Corinthians 5:20 in Its Context," in *Jesus, Paul, and Early Christianity: Studies in Honor of Henk Jan de Jonge*, ed. R. Buitenwerf, H. W. Hollander, and J. Tromp (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 28–38; Thrall, *Second Epistle*, 436–39; Lambrecht, *Second Corinthians*, 100.

plural of God's people. Christ's death, though not named here, is made the turning point of the exchange between Christ being made sin and "we" being made God's justice. The image is not of Christ as sin offering to God³⁸ but of Christ bearing for all the death that is the fate of sinners³⁹ or, I suggest, Christ bearing the consequences of the sin deeply imbedded in people, groups, and social structures. In return God's righteousness or justice is made possible for these very people and structures, as realized and hence realizable in Christ's life. Here sin and justice are taken as powers of evil and good respectively, not simply as evaluations of people. In our context, and it seems also in the Corinthians' context where the concern about sin was not high, this might be translated, "The one who did not know failure God made the epitome of failure so that we might become God's success in Christ," or, "The one who had no fear of death God allowed to die so that we might not fear death but take on his life." Yet Paul does introduce in this summary the ethical language of sin and its opposite, justice, recognizing that God's justice is not compromised but fulfilled in their common life in Christ. And he does this not as a rebuke or a warning to the Corinthians but in a positive claim, even a closing celebration, that "we" who are inextricably implicated in the structures of the world's sin can have, by dying in Christ's consequent death, a life that embodies God's justice.⁴⁰ Here the indicative swallows up the imperative.

And what may have been the Corinthian response to this? Tiresome as they must find it to hear Paul again commending himself by claiming not to be doing so, beginning with and returning to what he has done for their benefit (5:11-13, 18-19), he is nonetheless recognizing God's new creation in them. Yet because so much depends for Paul on Christ's death that demonstrates his love for all and draws all into dying to themselves and living for Christ in his risen life, the question must be whether they can make room for this. Without the experience that the privileged Paul has had in losing all respect when he began to represent this Jesus, can

38. Breytenbach, *Grace, Reconciliation, Concord*, 174-75, 180-82. Lambrecht argues that expiation of sin is not excluded in this passage but appears as Christ's representation of sinners in the reconciliation language and in the repeated preposition ὑπὲρ ("on behalf of, for," 5:14, 15, 21; see also Rom 5:10) (*Second Corinthians*, 105).

39. Thrall, *Second Epistle*, 441-42; Breytenbach, *Grace, Reconciliation, Concord*, 181-82.

40. The translation of γενόμεθα as "we might embody" I borrow from Marlene Crüsemann, "2 Korintherbrief," in *Bibel in gerechter Sprache*, ed. Ulrike Bail et al. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006), 2138.

they for whom Christ has meant an expanding life see Jesus' death, his execution, as the good news of their transformation? Can they see the justice they have found in God to be grounded in Jesus undergoing injustice on their behalf? Can they see themselves as one-time enemies or aliens whom God has reconciled through Christ's death and life? It may depend on whether they have known injustice and alienation themselves, either in their families or cities, or in relation to Paul after an early bond as the women clearly have, so that they are open to see their new life in Christ as reconciling them to God—and through that possibly even to Paul.⁴¹

41. See the excursus "The Social Status of the Corinthian Women and Paul" in my *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 62–71.

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