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WISDOM COMMENTARY

Volume 53

1–2 Timothy
Titus

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General Editor

A Michael Glazier Book

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To my own Timothy,
a true partner

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Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
Barn.	*Epistle to Barnabas*
BibInt	*Biblical Interpretation*
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CJ	*Classical Journal*
CurTM	*Currents in Theology and Mission*
Did.	*Didache*
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
Hist. eccl.	Eusebius, *Ecclesiatical History*
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IFT	Introductions in Feminist Theology
Ign. *Pol.*	Ignatius, *To Polycarp*

JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JFSR	*Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
Neot	*Neotestamentica*
NIBCNT	New International Biblical Commentary on the New Testament
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NPNF[1]	*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
PL	Patrologia Latina
Pol. *Phil.*	Polycarp, *To the Philippians*
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SemeiaSt	Semeia Study Series
SUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments
SymS	Symposium Series
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
Val.	*Against the Valentinians*
Virg.	*On the Veiling of Virgins*

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Foreword

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

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza
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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 Scripture-garden

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

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

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

Wisdom is a state of the human mind and spirit characterized by deep understanding and profound insight. It is elaborated as a quality possessed by the sages but also treasured as folk wisdom and wit. Wisdom is the power of discernment, deeper understanding, and creativity; it is the ability to move and to dance, to make the connections, to savor life, and to learn from experience. Wisdom is intelligence shaped by experience and sharpened by critical analysis. It is the ability to make sound choices and incisive decisions. Its root meaning comes to the fore in its Latin form *sapientia*, which is derived from the verb *sapere*, to taste and to savor something. Hence, this series of commentaries invites readers to taste, to evaluate, and to imagine.

In the figure of *Chokmah-Sophia-Sapientia-Wisdom*, ancient Jewish scriptures seek to hold together belief in the "one" G*d[3] of Israel with both masculine and feminine language and metaphors of the Divine.

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

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

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

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

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

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

5. See the discussion about nomenclature of the two testaments in the introduction, page xxxvii.

Editor's Introduction to Wisdom Commentary

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

Barbara E. Reid, OP

General Editor

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

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

A Symphony of Diverse Voices

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

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

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

Woman Wisdom

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

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

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

Feminism

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

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

Feminist Women and Men

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

Feminist Biblical Interpretation

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

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

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

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

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: JPS, 2003), 110–11.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Another groundbreaking work is the collection The Feminist Companion to the Bible Series, edited by Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield

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, MI: Eerdmans, 2012). Another notable collection is the three volumes edited by Susanne Scholtz, *Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Retrospect*, Recent Research in Biblical Studies 7, 8, 9 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 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, GA: SBL). Four 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 (2015); and *The High Middle Ages*, ed. Kari Elisabeth Børresen and Adriana Valerio (2015). For further information, see http://www.bibleandwomen.org.

Academic Press, 1993–2015), which comprises twenty volumes of commentaries on the Old Testament. The parallel series, Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings, edited by Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff and Maria Mayo Robbins (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 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 dynamics of imperialism. Attention is given to how the whole text functions and how it was and is heard, both in its

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, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), which show the complementarity of various approaches.

original context and today. Issues of particular concern to women—e.g., poverty, food, health, the environment, water—come to the fore.

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

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, 2002); Carol Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross S. Kraemer, *Women in Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: 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, KY: 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* (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 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 75–97, at 76.

19. See Judith Plaskow, "Anti-Judaism in Feminist Christian Interpretation," in *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Introduction* (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.

to enhance understanding of Jesus as well as Paul as Jews of their day and to forge solidarity among Jewish and Christian feminists.

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 its

20. See, for example, Phyllis A. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 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*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship, Old Testament Series (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 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 Press, 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

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

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Minnesota Press, 2008); Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore, eds., *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

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: Sheffield University, 1978).

26. See, e.g., Stephen D. Moore, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament: Derrida and Foucault at the Foot of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994); *The Bible in Theory: Critical and Postcritical Essays* (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 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, TN: Abingdon, 1993); David Rutledge, *Reading Marginally: Feminism, Deconstruction and the Bible*, BibInt 21 (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

such as ideological and autobiographical criticism. The former analyzes the system of ideas that underlies the power and 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

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 Rose Kitzberger, ed., *Autobiographical Biblical Interpretation: Between Text and Self* (Leiden: Deo, 2002); P. J. W. Schutte, "When *They*, *We*, and the Passive Become *I*—Introducing Autobiographical Biblical Criticism," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* vol. 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 Books, 2009).

31. E.g., Gale Yee, ed., *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 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, TN: Abingdon, 2006); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007); Judith E. McKinlay, *Reframing Her: Biblical Women in Postcolonial Focus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2004).

32. Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 9. See also, Musa W. Dube, ed., *Postcolonial Feminist*

sociology and cultural anthropology are used by feminists to investigate 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

Interpretation of the Bible (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000); Cristl M. Maier and Carolyn J. Sharp, *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, KY: 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, KY: 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).

divine. Intercultural analysis has become an indispensable tool for working toward justice for women at the global level.[38]

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]

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).

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 Press, 2011); Teresa Hornsby and Ken Stone, eds., *Bible Trouble: Queer Readings at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship* (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2011).

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

Biblical Authority

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

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 Press, 1987); Catherine LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991); Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The*

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.

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, Anglicans, and Eastern Orthodox believers, the Old Testament includes books written in Greek—the Deuterocanonical books, considered Apocrypha by Protestants. 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.[46] 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

Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse (New York: Crossroad, 1992). See further Elizabeth A. Johnson, "God," in *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, 128–30.

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

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

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.[47]

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, KY: 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 Com-

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

mentary 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

Gendered Letters

What does it mean that humankind is created male and female?

What behaviors are especially feminine or masculine?

Which domestic and ecclesial functions ought to be assigned based on a person's biological sex?

How should women and men understand their value in relation to each other?

Such questions have troubled Christians since the founding of the first churches when, it is reported, men and women participated together in worship, mission, and leadership. Early Christian texts disclose many profound conflicts about gender roles, about perceptions of femininity and masculinity, and about the relative status of women and men within the communities.

Disagreements about gender ideals existed *within* individual congregations: How ought women to be clothed when they pray? How should unmarried women behave?

Tensions arose *between* groups as believers argued about church administration: Could women function as teachers, as deacons, as prophets? How should widows serve and be cared for within the communities?

Those outside the faith speculated about the relationships between men and women in these households of faith: Were Christian men incapable of controlling their wives? Why were women in charge of some events? Who was kissing whom during their rituals?

Gendered Instruction in the Household of God

More so than other New Testament texts, the letters known as 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus, called collectively the Pastoral Letters, express strong opinions about these conflicts around gender. Their author is familiar with Jewish, Christian, and Roman popular and philosophical discussions about the different natures of and distinct roles for women and men. His own beliefs epitomize the "traditional" gender ideology: that because men and women are biologically different, they ought to behave differently in the family and society.

One key feature of the gender-differentiated hierarchy that the Pastorals' author adopts is *patriarchy*: the "rule of fathers." In a patriarchal arrangement, the free male head-of-household is given political, legal, and financial power that is denied to his wife, children, and slaves. Their social status is defined as in subjection to the man in authority over them as husband, father, and master. The author of the Pastorals views God as "Father," the patriarchal head-of-a-very-large-household, so that the idea of "God's household" functions as the ground of a practical theology that decrees every "family member" ought to take up their subordinated position in relation to this father and master God and after that to God's designated male leaders: Paul and his representatives, Timothy and Titus.

Indeed, the Pastorals assert that the organization of the whole cosmos is based on God's οἰκονομία, "household management" (1 Tim 1:4). This foundational concept sets the stage for these three letters in which households and their members, relationships, and purposes consistently appear as teaching topics. Our author believes that both household and house-church—however they may have overlapped in reality—live and move and have their being under God their father and overseer. God's activities on behalf of humanity and the churches are echoed in the domestic roles assigned to free Roman male citizens as husbands, fathers, and masters.

When the author commands, "be subject to rulers and authorities" (Titus 3:1), he is endorsing not only patriarchy but also *kyriarchy*. This term, invented by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, signifies the overarching authority of "lords."

> In classical antiquity, the rule of the emperor, lord, slave master, husband—the elite, freeborn, propertied gentleman to whom all disenfranchised men and all wo/men were subordinated—is best characterized by the neologism *kyriarchy.* In antiquity, the social system of kyriarchy was institutionalized either as empire or as a democratic political form

> of ruling that excluded all freeborn and slave wo/men from full citizenship and decision-making powers. Kyriarchy is best theorized as a complex pyramidal system of intersecting multiplicative social and religious structures of superordination and subordination, of ruling and oppression. Kyriarchal relations of domination are built on elite male property rights and privileges as well as on the exploitation, dependency, inferiority, and obedience of wo/men who signify all those subordinated. Such kyriarchal relations are still at work today in the multiplicative intersectionality of class, race, gender, ethnicity, empire, and other structures of discrimination.[1]

There is no doubt that the gender ideology of the Pastorals is patriarchal and kyriarchal since it values the male, the masculine, and the supposedly strong over the female, the feminine, and the hypothetically weak. Kyriarchy's "intersecting multiplicative social and religious structures" surface conspicuously in our author's treatments of relationships between enslaved persons (female and male) and "free" slaveholders (both male and female), as well as in his "imperial" theological assertions about God and Christ.

The Pastoral Letters Collection

This commentary, like many others, treats 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus as a collection of three letters written by the same author. As in modern times, it was a familiar practice for well-known authors in the ancient world to gather their letters for publication. Additionally, letter collections ascribed to famous philosophers and their students were compiled so that they could be studied as a group. Some followers of the apostle Paul undoubtedly did this with the letters he wrote, since these appear together (in varied sequences) in many ancient New Testament manuscripts and in lists of texts read by early Christian churches. While the Pastoral Letters are three single components of this larger Pauline letter collection, they are still consistently positioned as a smaller cluster (including the letter to Philemon) of "letters to individuals" following what are called the "letters to churches" (Romans through 2 Thessalonians, in canonical order).

Another indication that the Pastorals may appropriately be interpreted as an interrelated collection is that they show remarkable similarities to

1. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Empowering Memory and Movement: Thinking and Working Across Borders* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2014), 525.

each other and, at the same time, some strong dissimilarities to the other Pauline letters. Tertullian (third century CE) and Augustine (fifth century CE) name the topic of church organization as one link between the Pastorals.[2] Other topics common to all three Pastorals are countering opponents, household management (marriage, children, slaves, and wealth), the church's reputation in society, and education (both teaching and learning). Although the rest of Paul's letters also address these issues, the Pastorals use a vocabulary and style of argumentation that are strikingly distinctive, especially when reading the documents in Greek.

What's more, many of the opinions and theological statements in the Pastorals agree with each other but do not match up with those found in the letters known to be written by Paul (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon). For example, when Paul criticizes his opponents in Romans, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and Philippians, he gives specifics points of disagreement with them. In the Pastorals, the author attacks his opposition in more general terms as teaching "different doctrine" (ἑτεροδιδασκαλεῖν, 1 Tim 1:3) but only rarely describes the contents of this problematic teaching. Likewise it is difficult to imagine the Paul who wrote the complicated argument on salvation by faith found in Romans and Galatians asserting instead that "she [probably meaning a believing woman] will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty" (1 Tim 2:15). Significantly for the aims of this commentary, the views of the Pastorals on the nature and roles of women diverge from the activities of believing women in Paul's apostolic mission as he himself depicts them (e.g., Rom 16; 1 Cor 11:2-16; Phil 4:2-3). On these three subjects—opponents, salvation, and women—among others, the Pastoral Letters present a consistent worldview and one that varies from the outlook of Paul in the seven letters listed above.

In the last quarter century, some scholars have moved away from the approach of reading the Pastorals as an interconnected letter collection and instead have stressed the value of analyzing 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus as individual documents. This sort of procedure is undoubtedly beneficial for understanding each letter, and yet in order to gain a more expansive sense of the Pastorals, they still need to be interpreted in light of each other. As I. Howard Marshall definitively states: "Despite some dissent, the three letters are by one author. . . . This means that

2. Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* 5.21, and Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* 4.16.

the letters can be considered together as a group of writings. . . . They represent a common outlook."[3] Recognizing the Pastorals as a small harmonized collection recommends the usefulness of a study method based on rereadings and cross-references among the three letters. Since the Pastorals have a solid position within the larger Pauline letter collection, it is also instructive to read them alongside these other canonical letters.

A Pseudonymous Author

It is one thing to discern that the Pastorals are all written by the same author and still another thing to identify who that author is. From the second century until around 1800 CE, the Pastorals were accepted as letters from Paul himself. However, the notion of non-Pauline authorship gradually took hold among scholars, so that by the mid-twentieth century, a solid majority agreed that they were not written by Paul. The evidence for this view consists of the numerous elements that distinguish the Pastorals from the authentic Pauline letters, which I have already summarized above and will continue to point out in later chapters. There are some commentators who argue that the differences in language and contents do not necessarily mean that the author of the Pastorals is not Paul. Maybe as Paul aged his writing style changed. Or he employed a secretary who was allowed greater leeway in the letters' composition. Or exceptional conflicts arose in a later decade that required Paul to address topics in an atypical fashion. However, none of these possibilities has proved very convincing, in large part because none alone can explain the whole range of recognized disparities in style and content. For most scholars, it is the substantial *accumulation* of all the literary, historical, and theological differences that makes the case for a pseudonymous author a more plausible solution to the question.

Another piece of evidence in favor of a pseudonymous author emerges from the curriculum of Greco-Roman education: for the (mostly male) students, it was a customary assignment to compose a text in the name and *persona* of a well-known figure. Unlike today, this was considered not as an attempt at forgery but rather as both a learning strategy and an honoring of the influence of that person. In such a literary culture, it is possible to envision a late first-century leader in a Pauline church

3. I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 1.

writing letters that would imitate and reinterpret Paul's teachings for his particular location.

This widely held academic opinion of a pseudonymous author is not ordinarily encountered in modern churches, in spite of the fact that many pastors have been taught that Paul did not compose the Pastorals. In traditions where Bible education is emphasized, lay readers are probably well-aware that the letters themselves start right off with Paul's name, and since many study the Scriptures for personal devotional reasons, there seems to be no necessary reason for questioning the claim. Moreover, in liturgical traditions, worshipers do not often hear readings from the Pastorals at the services. Only short and divided passages have been selected, and these appear just eleven times in the Roman Catholic Lectionary, with nine of these also adopted for the Revised Common Lectionary. The chances that a sermon might be preached on one of these texts must be slim, and when it does occur, the wise preacher ought to be reluctant to tackle the subject of how a pseudonymous author came to be included in the New Testament canon.

An additional problem arises on occasion when a lay reader does learn that Paul probably did not write the Pastorals: the suspicion of a pseudonym allows these letters to be diminished in influence since they have lost their apostolic stamp of approval. In fact, some scholars who argue for Pauline authorship are especially concerned that the Pastorals do not become devalued as Christian texts. Luke Timothy Johnson worries "They [the Pastorals] are not technically outside the canon, but they may as well be for all the attention they receive, especially when elements in the Pastorals (such as their statements on women) are repugnant to present-day readers."[4] Of course, deciding that the Pastorals are Paul's own work may not make their teachings about women any less "repugnant," and at any rate, the letters are still present in the New Testament canon. As a result, the effects of their instruction—on women and men, on slavery and wealth, doctrinal conflicts and church offices—have been powerful forces in the history of Western societies that are experienced to this very day.

One further note: you may have wondered why I refer to this pseudonymous author as "he" or "him." Since we know so little about the actual author, how can I be sure that the Pastorals were written by a man

4. Luke Timothy Johnson, *First and Second Letters to Timothy*, AB 35A (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 57.

and not by a woman? Certainly a female believer might hold and agree with the opinions found in these letters. The main reason I think it more likely that the author is male is related to his level of education. Roman historians estimate that no more than 10–15 percent of the urban population at that time would have been literate enough to write such texts. The vast majority of those people would have been male, because education for females was very restricted. The author's written composition and style place him among those men of high enough status to have completed what we would think of as secondary schooling. Another reason I use masculine pronouns for the author is due to his own self-presentation. The author wants the reader to believe he is a man, a particular man, the legendary apostle Paul. If the author were known (or found out) to be a woman, the Pastorals' teachings would have become meaningless, duplicitous, and falsified because women were "not allowed to teach, or to have authority over a man" (1 Tim 2:12). As you will read throughout this commentary, in the communities envisioned by the author, only (higher-status) men were allowed to speak and teach, preside and make decisions. Since he poses as one such admirable male leader who serves as an example for other faithful men, I have decided to adopt his masculine presentation.

A Constructed Social Location

Every New Testament letter represents just one side of a communication process: we have the senders' opinions, understandings, and reactions, while those of the recipients can only be imagined or inferred from the ideas and arguments offered in the letter. Later readers, lacking familiarity with the details behind the correspondence, must try to tease out the facts from the sender's characterization of the setting.

In the case of the Pastorals, the pseudonymous author has added even more complexity to their interpretation because he has created a setting that never existed. He is not "really" Paul, and the proposed recipients Timothy and Titus are not actually present in his day. If they were, they could presumably verify the letters as authentically Pauline. This means that the city of Ephesus (for 1 and 2 Timothy) and the island of Crete (for Titus) are not necessarily indications of historical destinations. The exact teachings and activities of the opponents of the real author likewise remain unclear. Of special concern for this commentary is the actual behavior of women in the communities. In several passages, the author paints a picture of undisciplined females who are upsetting the stability

of households and house-churches (e.g., 1 Tim 5:13-15; 2 Tim 3:6-7; Titus 2:3-5), but we cannot be sure to what extent this was happening in reality. A similar situation applies when we consider his commands to enslaved persons: were the slaves really disrespectful to their masters (1 Tim 6:2), and were they talking back and pilfering (Titus 2:9-10)?[5] Because we have only his perspective of the situation on the ground, we do not know what prompted the author to compose these letters, only that he felt some need to address issues that he identifies as problems for his own communities. He has placed these teachings back in time, putting them into the very words of Paul. This means that, while he tackles issues of concern to him, it is the revered apostle Paul who is depicted as a prescient teacher who predicts and deplores elements of the author's present situation.

As for the recipients, perhaps he hopes that his readers will assume that Timothy and Titus received the Pastorals as private communication, but then they or someone else preserved the letters until they were "rediscovered" at an appropriate time. Even though each of the Pastorals is written under just one name and sent to another individual, it is clear that the author expects their contents to be shared with other members of the church(es). He instructs Timothy: "and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people [men] who will be able to teach others as well" (2 Tim 2:2; my insertion). Without question, the Pastorals emphasize the teaching roles of Paul, Timothy, and Titus, and the author offers the letters as the "core curriculum" for the education of Christians. Therefore, these letters are not "private" in the sense of confidential correspondence; rather, they obviously anticipate reception by a much wider audience, who are, in a way, "reading over the shoulders" of Timothy and Titus.

Although the pseudonymous author has submerged the real occasion(s) for the Pastorals, modern readers may still presume that he has painted a realistic picture of the structure and dynamics of at least some Christian communities of his own place and time. As a result, he formulates a representation that would be historically plausible to the earliest readers, offering an assortment of ingredients drawn from stories about and texts from Paul that are chosen for their applicability to the ecclesial situations faced by the apostle. While the dating of the Pastorals

5. On these possibilities, see Emerson B. Powery's comments in his "Interpretive Essay: The Pastor's Commands to Enslaved Christians: 1 Timothy 6:2 and Titus 2:9-10," below, pp. 162–65.

is much debated (suggestions range from the last third of the first century CE to much later in the second century CE), a date around 100 CE would account for the author's knowledge of other Pauline letters. This date also allows for changes since Paul's lifetime in the conflicts, activities, and social issues affecting church life.

Within this commentary, then, I interpret the Pastorals as a small collection composed by a later church leader under the name of the apostle Paul. This man adapted Paul's letter-writing strategies to his own constructed social location. The author of the Pastorals seems to know so much about the entire Pauline approach to written teachings that we can safely assume that he possessed detailed knowledge of Paul's correspondence (and other oral and written traditions about Paul) and indeed probably had access to actual copies of some of the letters. He thought of himself as a teacher in the Pauline tradition, an authoritative one who could "correctly" convey Paul's instructions in the proper form and style.

Recurring Topics in the Pastorals

Many of the topics treated in the Pastorals will be familiar to readers of other Pauline letters, but our author addresses them in his own identifiable writing style and argues on the basis of his distinctive worldview. Promoting the paradigm of the "household of God" (οἶκος θεοῦ; 1 Tim 3:15), he writes about ecclesial structures, ritual, and leadership positions. His focus on this religious household has its counterpart in guidance for the actual households of believers—for married partners, parents, widows, children, and slaves, and for the management of family wealth and possessions. He names and critiques internal opponents to his instructions while also advising the house-churches on how to conduct themselves within their broader social surroundings. The author conceives of his writing project as part of an educational process whereby community members will demonstrate a Christian version of the moral excellence advocated by Greco-Roman philosophical traditions.

For each topic, the letters draw on and yet also differ from the perspective and advice given in letters known to be from Paul. In a further step that is especially pertinent for this commentary, the author explicitly deals with each of these recurring topics when he refers to women, their social roles, church activities, and virtuous development. As we shall see in each of the Pastorals, the author focuses on the moral conduct of women. He seems to perceive female believers as most liable to fail in virtue and most likely to exemplify immoral behavior within the house-

churches and in their relations with outsiders. The result is that "women's morality" becomes fundamental to all of his teachings, so fundamental in fact that he has given more direct instructions for women than are found in any other Christian writing of the church's first century.

Approaching the Pastoral Letters

In this commentary I offer one feminist's perspective on the Pastorals. That my interpretations are not the only feminist understandings of these texts will be obvious from reading the valuable exegetical comments provided by the other contributors: Jouette M. Bassler; Colleen M. Conway; Neil Elliott; Eloy Escamilla; Eh Tar Gay; Jennifer A. Glancy; Ekram Kachu; Marianne Bjelland Kartzow; Emerson B. Powery; Anna Rebecca Solevåg; Wolfgang Stegemann; Elsa Tamez; Jay Twomey; and Elijah R. Zehyoue. In addition, my thoughts are grounded in and improved by the work of other feminist biblical scholars who have written about the Pastoral Letters: Joanna Dewey; Margaret Y. MacDonald; Linda M. Maloney; Clarice J. Martin; Annette Merz; Carolyn Osiek; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza; Ulrike Wagener; Frances M. Young; and Korinna Zamfir.[6] Research on slavery and slave societies in the ancient world has taken on a heightened importance as Americans deliberate the role of race in our own social history. I have gained much insight into the Pastorals' teachings about slaves from the studies of classicists Keith Bradley, Jennifer A. Glancy, J. Albert Harrill, Sandra R. Joshel, Sheila Murnaghan, and Richard P. Saller.[7] Finally, I deeply appreciate three Chicago-area scholars who supported the writing of this commentary. Barbara Reid, vice president and academic dean of the Catholic Theological Union and general editor of the Wisdom Commentary Series, first asked me to serve as author and continually and warmly encouraged me in the project. Sarah Tanzer, professor of New Testament and Early Judaism at McCormick Theological Seminary and the volume editor for this book, has been a lively, careful, and essential first reader of each draft; her collegial approach has been a source of strength to me. Margaret M. Mitchell, Shailer Mathews Professor of New Testament and Early Christian Literature and then-dean of the Divinity School at the University of Chicago, invited me to teach a course on the Pastoral Letters. That teaching experience not only re-immersed

6. The studies of these scholars are cited in various chapters.

7. The analyses of these authors appear in the commentary on 1 Tim 6 and Titus 2 below.

me in the Pastorals but also provided me with insightful student conversation partners. Every scholar mentioned in this paragraph has helped to challenge and develop my understandings of the letters, and I am grateful to benefit from this expanded interpretive circle.

My working definition of *feminism* derives from the basic idea that women and men deserve equal rights under the law, at the workplace, in the home, at schools and other communal organizations, and, for our purposes, especially in the churches. This essential commitment leads me to question hierarchical social structures, to distrust gender constructs, and to resist injustices based on perceived differences of race, sexuality, class, and religion. Such questioning, distrust, and resistance are just as necessary for feminist biblical interpretation. Viewing the Scriptures through the lens of this "hermeneutic of suspicion" helps to "uncover many levels of patriarchal bias, some in the Bible itself, others developed by later interpreters and recorded and perpetuated in theological works, scholarly biblical commentaries and histories, and in popular devotional literature."[8] Throughout this commentary, I ask questions that bring gender, status, and authority to the fore: How does the composition of letters in the name of Paul impinge on *the women* in the intended audience? Compared with men, how are *women* depicted as teachers and learners? What theological beliefs does the author use to justify his instructions *about women and men* in his communities? What does he presume about the conventional social *hierarchy* of his culture? How does he handle the *status divisions* caused by differences in gender, family origins, and wealth? How have these canonical teachings *shaped the lives* of people throughout history and in various social locations?

My answers to such questions derive primarily from approaches used by historical-critical scholars and in particular from close readings of the Pastorals based on literary analysis and comparisons with other written sources from the Greco-Roman world. I consider the cultural expectations and rhetorical strategies that seem to have influenced our author as well as relevant pieces of archaeological and epigraphical evidence. As a feminist reader trying to situate these texts in their particular social location, I do not intend to justify his opinions or soften the oppressive effects of his teachings. Instead I hope to show that his Roman Imperial position is historically far distant from our postmodern world.

8. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, "Hermeneutic of Suspicion," in *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, ed. Letty M. Russell and J. Shannon Carson (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 27.

The overarching problem—for feminists, for present-day Christians, for women and men more generally, and for commentary writers more specifically—is that these letters as a group contain arguably the most sexist, exclusivist, and socially oppressive teachings in the New Testament. Even though a huge historical and social gap exists between us and the world of the Pastorals, it is not at all difficult to locate living people, groups, and societies that continue to be inhibited, insulted, and harmed by these instructions. Because of the church's interpretations of the Pastorals and because the letters themselves claim to be inspired by God, male domination has been reinforced in a wide range of religious and civic institutions so that in many times and places women have been dismissed, abused, and simply not valued as full persons. Furthermore, the Pastorals' teachings for masters and slaves ensured that generations of people suffered under slavery, and their descendants continue to bear the brunt of societal racism. Such oppressions exemplify why the Pastoral Letters are troubling texts.

A straightforward and widespread approach to the Pastorals is to minimize their presence in the New Testament canon. One may simply avoid reading them or just select a few trouble-free verses for devotional or liturgical purposes, as the lectionary committees have done. One could deny the religious authority vested in these letters or set aside the Pastorals' teachings with a statement like "That was then, this is now." The approach of this commentary is different. I intend to demonstrate the unmistakable patriarchal roots of the author's gender ideology, to question his inflexible kyriarchal worldview, and to wrestle openly with the negative consequences that have occurred when his words were taken seriously by the Christian churches. By encouraging a deeper engagement with these letters, I want to contribute to the many challenging conversations that are already happening around issues of gender, race, and power. By studying the Pastorals Letters with our minds sharpened and our hearts turned toward a generous freedom, we can struggle most productively with the influences of their teachings, past and present, and we can create a future church and a future world that are more just, truly inclusive, and indelibly marked by God's grace.

1 Timothy 1

Order and Disorder

Before reading this letter it is important to remember not only that the sender "Paul" and the recipient "Timothy" are pseudonyms for the real persons but also that the situation of the church in Ephesus is artificial as well. That is, there is no independent evidence about the conflicts this church was supposedly experiencing in the actual times when Paul and Timothy were co-workers. Nevertheless, in order for the letter to be received as authoritative and relevant, the author's description must correspond near enough to the historical reality of his congregations. His writing would need to reflect the sorts of persons, tensions, and movements already familiar to his audience and would also need to be understood as a valid response to those situations.

As with all letters attributed to Paul in the New Testament,[1] 1 Timothy opens with the apostle's name as the letter-writer (1:1). However, usually in the other letters, at least one co-sender is named and most often this is Timothy (2 Cor 1:2; Phil 1:1; Col 1:1; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; Phlm 1). Only the letters to the Romans and the Ephesians identify Paul as sole author.[2] Of course, since the supposed circumstances of the Pastorals

1. In canonical order these are: Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1–2 Thessalonians, 1–2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon.

2. First Corinthians identifies Sosthenes as a co-sender (1:1); Galatians adds "all the members of God's family who are with me" as co-senders (1:1).

1 Tim 1:1-2

[1]Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope,

[2]To Timothy, my loyal child in the faith:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

dictate that Timothy is the recipient of two of the letters, he cannot be a co-author. What sets the openings of all three Pastorals apart from those of the rest of the Pauline collection is that they have both a single author (Paul) *and* a single addressee (either Timothy or Titus). Thus, at a first reading, these letters are designed as correspondence between two individual (male) church leaders, rather than as letters written to entire communities. In spite of this, a closer reading of these "letters between individuals" reveals that in reality they are meant to be heard, studied, and acted upon by believers and groups within the author's larger field of vision. That the church ultimately included the Pastorals in the canon shows that they were useful for such a collective audience and not just for Timothy and Titus. It is as if members of the author's house-churches peer over the shoulders of Paul's named co-workers and examine the private correspondence of their historic leaders.

The relationship between the sender and recipient is defined by a familial label: Timothy is called the true, genuine, legitimate, "loyal child in faith" (1 Tim 1:2; see also, Titus 1:4 and 2 Tim 1:2). This then implies that Paul is Timothy's father in faith, although our author does not state this as clearly as Paul does in 1 Cor 4:14-17 (see also 1 Thess 2:11). In this way, the very beginning of this letter primes the reader for a particular social context: the Roman patriarchal household. "Paul" is an older authoritative man who is likened to a father of the younger Timothy who is his legitimate apostolic son, his heir, and his successor. As the letter continues, the idea of Timothy's legitimacy—as if he were a child born within a legal marriage or one who is legally adopted—must be kept in mind because Paul has a piece of paternal property (παραθήκη, "deposit," 1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 1:12, 14)[3] to hand down to Timothy: the "instruction" (1 Tim 1:5, 18), also called "the sound teaching" (1:10). For

3. See my comments on this word in "Translation Matters: 'What Has Been Entrusted,'" p. 96.

1 Tim 1:3-7

[3]I urge you, as I did when I was on my way to Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus so that you may instruct certain people not to teach any different doctrine, [4]and not to occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies that promote speculations rather than the divine training that is known by faith.[5]But the aim of such instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith. [6]Some people have deviated from these and turned to meaningless talk, [7]desiring to be teachers of the law without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions.

Pauline communities reading this letter, the apostolic authority—which is embedded in Paul's very name as well as in the claims about his call by God—is similarly passed down in order to validate the leadership and teachings of his successors, including Timothy. Since the typical family hierarchy also resonates in the naming of God as "Father" (although only here in 1 Timothy) and of Christ Jesus as "master" or "Lord" (1:2), the authorization flows from the top down: from fathers to sons, from God and Christ to Paul and then to Timothy. This is the process by which Timothy receives the charge: his work is approved and empowered by a divine and human kyriarchal chain of command.

For the author, the concept of God as supreme head-of-a-very-large-household (1 Tim 1:17; 3:15; 6:15-16) means that everyone else stands in an inferior position to this superior God. However, Paul and Timothy are God's designated human representatives, which means that they are responsible for bringing about the proper subordination of those who are teachers of a "different doctrine" (1:3-4). These people have supposedly "deviated" (1:6) from the "divine training that is known by faith" (1:4).

Who are these deviating persons? The author refers to them as "certain people" (1 Tim 1:3, 6, 19; also Gal 1:7), an uncomplimentary label typically used in polemical writings of that time. We do not know the gender of these teachers because the Greek employs the "generic" masculine for groups that might include both women and men. When specific opponents are named in the Pastorals, these are all men (e.g., 1 Tim 1:20), but since women are prohibited from teaching (2:12) and are given various other corrective instructions (2:9-10; 5:11-15), some of them may be accused here as well. At any rate, these are persons who are or were part of the believing communities and over whom "Timothy" is expected

1 Tim 1:8-11

[8]Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it legitimately. [9]This means understanding that the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their father or mother, for murderers, [10]fornicators, sodomites, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching [11]that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

TRANSLATION MATTERS: "TRAINING"

The Greek word translated by the NRSV as "training" (1:4) is οἰκονομία. Other English translations suggested are: "plan," "stewardship," "office," or "economy." Still, this word conspicuously evokes the Greco-Roman household since its prefix is related to the word οἶκος, which means "house" or "household." The term *oikonomia* serves also as a title for ancient philosophical and practical treatises written on household management (reflecting the idea of "home economics"). In such texts, the authors give advice on marriage, childrearing, and slave supervision, as well as agricultural practices and family religious observances. Similarly, in 1 Tim 1:4, the idea of instructions on "God's household management" conveys a powerful image of the kind of teaching and community life that Timothy is supposed to establish, an image that is reinforced later in the letter when the author refers to "how one ought to behave in the household of God" (1 Tim 3:15).

to have some influence. They are internal adversaries, not outside agitators. They have a connection to the household of God.

What are their differing teachings? Again, the evidence is unclear. Our author specifies that they "occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies" (1 Tim 1:4) and have "turned to meaningless talk" (1:6). Some aspects of Jewish law also seem to be in question (1:7), yet these teachers are accused more generally of teaching the law erroneously rather than specifically requiring circumcision or adherence to ritual regulations. In this first chapter, a brief assertion is made that following the approved "instruction" brings both external and internal results: "love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith" (1:5). Like all the other New Testament writers, this author understands that faith in Jesus Christ must be demonstrated by a loving way of life that is wholly consistent with one's mental and emotional attitudes toward God. Therefore, he attacks the teachers of different doctrine on both counts: they neither talk the talk nor walk the walk.

TRANSLATION MATTERS: "DISOBEDIENT"

The Pastoral Letters are sprinkled with terms about order and disorder. The origin of the Greek word group is the precise and organized arrangement of military forces ready for battle. In 1 Tim 1:9, the word translated "disobedient" (ἀνυπότακτος) comes from these roots. It might also be rendered "unruly," "independent," "undisciplined," "insubordinate," or "rebellious."

The Greek verb for being in proper order within a hierarchy is ὑποτάσσω. It may be translated "I submit to" or "I am subordinate to." The Pastorals use these terms especially for dis/orderly relationships between persons in the household (i.e., 1 Tim 1:9; 2:11; 3:4; Titus 1:6, 10; 2:5, 9), but also for the submissive behavior that people owe to governing authorities (Titus 3:1).

Within this hazy depiction, the author seeks to de-legitimate the other teachers by means of an *ad hominem* attack. First Timothy 1:8-10 accuses them of not using the law in the right way and further associates them with serious illegal and immoral behavior. Four pairs of terms state that the law is laid down for "the lawless and disobedient, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their father or mother" (1:9). These are followed by six single words for a total of fourteen pejorative labels, all of which are unlawful under Roman and/or Jewish law. They are summarized by the catch-all phrase "and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God" (1:10-11). Although each of these socially abhorrent slurs disparages the behavior and not the doctrinal stances of the teachers, the author views their intellectual exercises as causes of such immoral behavior.

For modern readers, such polemical writing based on a thorough condemnation of opponents may be disconcerting if not entirely off-putting. This is not because we are unused to such attacks in many of our own societal and political settings where disagreements often lead to anger, threats, irrational conclusions, and deep interpersonal and social divides. Rather, we tend toward a naïve view that Christian community life ought to be different from life in the real world. At the least, we think, the dynamics in the earliest churches must have been more caring and free of caustic debate and discord. The Pastorals, among other early Christian texts, give evidence that there was no Golden Age of church life; conflicts have existed from the very beginning.

The rhetoric of the author of the Pastorals is controlled by his social location; he handles the opposition in ways that are culturally acceptable

TRANSLATION MATTERS: ANCIENT VICES

Two of the fourteen insults deserve separate comment because their presence in Christian Scripture has fostered oppression for two groups of persons. In my comments on these verses, I critique the author's polemical strategies more broadly.

1. ἀρσενοκοίταις ("sodomites") has received much attention in the last few decades since it is in one of the "clobber texts" used by some Christians in order to exclude LGBTQ persons from church offices. The word is a combination of "male" and "bed" as a euphemism for sexual intercourse, and it appears for the first time in all Greek literature in 1 Cor 6:9 and then here in 1 Timothy. In both verses, the term is included for rhetorical purposes as part of a list of vices considered to be repugnant in that social location. However, the NRSV choice of "sodomites" is anachronistic and problematic because we do not know exactly what the term meant to the authors or audience.[4]

2. ἀνδραποδισταῖς ("slave traders") appears only here in the New Testament and is a compound word for "man-stealers" or "kidnappers." While American abolitionists and modern readers might rejoice to interpret this as an "early Christian condemnation of slavery or the slave trade, [instead] the language of 1 Timothy articulates attitudes commonplace among masters in the Roman Empire. . . . The ancient world believed in the moral goodness of slavery yet condemned the immorality of slave traders."[5] This evidence means that, rather than making a socially revolutionary statement, the term "slave traders" undoubtedly intensifies our author's attacks on the other teachers.[6]

for himself and his audience. His approach to the other teachers is that they must be brought into line by intimidation and pressure. In order to maintain orderly behavior among the rest of his audience, he lifts up the opponents as negative examples while offering the rewards of God's mercy and salvation to those who abide instead by his own teachings. His worldview differs from a postmodern position that promotes personal freedom and dignity, values universal human rights, and operates within a sweeping global interconnectedness. Therefore, rather than

4. For a short discussion of translation and interpretation, see David J. Lull, "Jesus, Paul, and Homosexuals," *CurTM* 34 (June 2007): 203–4. For a longer essay, see Dale B. Martin, "*Arsenokoitês* and *Malakos:* Meanings and Consequences," in *Biblical Ethics & Homosexuality: Listening to Scripture*, ed. Robert L. Brawley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 124–29.

5. J. Albert Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament: Literary, Social, and Moral Dimensions* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 141.

6. In the chapter on Titus 2, the "Interpretive Essay" by Emerson Powery asserts that the author of the Pastorals *is* opposed to the slave trade. See pp. 161–62 below.

1 Tim 1:12-17

[12]I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service, [13]even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, [14]and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. [15]The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost. [16]But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making me an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life. [17]To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

adopting the author's perspectives on conflict and disagreement that have been inscribed in the canonical texts, the interpreter ought to consider instead various strategies for conflict transformation that have emerged from other entities such as the historical Peace Churches (Society of Friends, Mennonites, and Church of the Brethren), nonviolent resistance movements, and the fields of group dynamics, family systems theory, and legal mediation. The Pastorals' use of abusive language and their advocacy of ostracism and shunning of opposition ought to have no place in contemporary religious or civic groups.

The author asserts as a summary that both the teachers and their instruction are the very opposite of the "sound teaching" of 1 Tim 1:10,[7] while his own teaching is consistent with the "the glorious gospel of the blessed God" (1:11). Verse 11 ends with "which he entrusted to me," a phrase that bridges to the next section of the letter, which is a description of Paul's experience of coming to be an apostle.

This biographically based passage that appears late in Year C of the New Revised Common Lectionary conveys an image of a merciful God reaching out to Paul, who then functions as a model for the rest of humankind. On God's and Christ's side, the author mentions positive attributes: strengthening and appointing (1 Tim 1:12); mercy (1:13, 16); grace, faith, and love (1:14); and patience and eternal life (1:16). On Paul's side, we find gratitude (1:12, 17) and acceptance of the gifts of God (1:16), as well as the admission of the faults of his previous life (1:13) as the

7. On this favorite Pastorals phrase, see in this volume "Translation Matters: 'Sound Doctrine,'" p. 146.

1 Tim 1:18-20

[18]I am giving you these instructions, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies made earlier about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, [19]having faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience, certain persons have suffered shipwreck in the faith; [20]among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have turned over to Satan, so that they may learn not to blaspheme.

TRANSLATION MATTERS: "FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT"

In 1 Tim 1:18, this command means to engage in military combat. In 1 Tim 6:12 and 2 Tim 4:7, the same English translation is given, but there the Greek indicates that the "fight" is more like an athletic competition. The author draws on the military language again in 2 Tim 2:3-4. Both the military and athletic images presume male opponents, advancing the notion that "Timothy" is in a win-lose confrontation with the so-called false teachers.

"foremost" of sinners (1:15). "Paul" lists three sins, calling himself "a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence" (1:13), whereas in the undisputed letters of Paul, the apostle admits only to "persecuting" the assemblies (1 Cor 15:9; Gal 1:13; and Phil 3:6).[8] In spite of Paul's sins, God regards Paul as "faithful" (1 Tim 1:12), perhaps because he "acted ignorantly in unbelief," although that excuse is not used in Phil 3:6. Our author sounds a Pauline note when he mentions "the grace of our Lord" (1 Tim 1:14). Since God extends grace to such a sinner as this, it necessarily must be extended also to all other sinners (1:15). In fact, Paul has become a prototype for everyone who subsequently comes to believe in Jesus Christ (1:16). Any reader of this letter can consider the transformation of Paul's life to be a reliable example of how God deals with sinners: by saving them through Christ Jesus (1:15). Such an act of God can only result in a human response of praise and blessing (1:17).

These last few verses return to themes raised earlier in the chapter. Our author re-emphasizes the father-child relationship between Paul and Timothy, in particular that Paul designates Timothy as the recipient of his "instructions" (1 Tim 1:18). In addition, Timothy supposedly received authorization by means of "prophecies made earlier" about him, although

8. Paul's harassment of believers is also mentioned in Acts 8:1 and 9:1-2.

this event is not documented elsewhere in the New Testament. By following the instructions and the prophecies, it is said that Timothy will be able to "fight the good fight" because he will then possess "faith and a good conscience," an echo of "the aim of such instruction" (1:5).

Finally, another censure of the opponents indicts the anonymous "certain persons" (as in 1 Tim 1:3) by supplying two names—Hymenaeus and Alexander—and describing the punishment meted out by "Paul," which appears to be exclusion from the community of faith (1:19b-20). While the reason given for this action is that it is "corrective discipline" (so that "they may learn not to blaspheme"), the ostracism seems inconsistent, at the least, with the story of God's mercy shown to Paul, the "foremost of sinners" (1:15).