Author's Introduction to 1 Peter

Reading from the Margins

A Hermeneutical Challenge

Some students think of feminist criticism as a synonym for Women's Studies, a broad, multidisciplinary area that sits alongside the similarly named African American and Diaspora Studies program in the university. Others imagine it as a code for the ideology of an aggressive political agenda that dare not speak its real name: destruction and dismantling of all structures of privilege and power created by men. "She hates everything," a young seminarian, himself a member of a minority from Indonesia, said after reading part of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's foundational work, *In Memory of Her*.[1] After some personal reassurance that "no, she doesn't . . . really," he agreed to give it another go. Schüssler Fiorenza highlights the problematic power of linguistic coding. At one point the author of Ephesians can speak of the new human being created

1. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983). Schüssler Fiorenza provides a lucid explanation of her feminist critical approach in her commentary on Ephesians for this series. See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Ephesians*, WCS 50 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2017), xix–lxxxii. While 1 Peter poses many of the same problematic foundations for later suppression of women, minorities, and enslaved persons as Ephesians, I will not adopt the radical retranslation and dismantling of the language of the epistle that Schüssler Fiorenza does. Nor will I use "G*d" when referring to Israel's deity.

in Christ using inclusive, nongendered terms (Eph 4:24), only to turn around and adopt male-centered household domination language in speaking of wives and husbands (Eph 5:22-33). Schüssler Fiorenza rightly objects to a commonly used apology for the unacceptable language of violence, oppression, and domination in the Bible, namely, highlighting liberating positive expressions as what "Scripture really teaches" and erasing the rest as past history or cultural conditioning. On the contrary, she insists that "a critical feminist reading 'against the grain' is called for! Such a reading must engage in a critical-constructive analysis of the text in such a way that, on the one hand, it can undo the kyriarchal determination of the symbolic world of Ephesians, and, on the other hand, it can focus on and strengthen the text's inclusive egalitarian vision."[2]

By introducing the neologism "kyriarchal" to associate patterns of domination by "the lords of . . . " with the christological honorific "Lord" for the crucified Jesus who was the object of early Christian devotion, Schüssler Fiorenza combines political, sociocultural, and theological discourses. Feminist criticism addresses these dimensions on three levels: context of composition, history of influence, and theological appropriation of the text today. Even the most rigorously limited historical-critical reconstruction of the late-first-century context within which these pseudepigraphical apostolic letters by Paul (Ephesians) and Peter (1 Peter) were composed has been influenced by the history of reception and is responsive to judgments about theological or social relevance.[3] To read Scripture "against the grain," as Schüssler Fiorenza puts it, surfaces possibilities that challenge the linguistic, political, and social structures taken for granted in churches today.[4] It is not employed

2. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Ephesians*, lxxxii. In her feminist critique of the allegedly liberating accounts of the historical Jesus, she notes the superficiality of so-called social-scientific models that permit an underlying kyriarchal ethos to go unchallenged, frequently by appeals to the "honor/shame" culture of antiquity (Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* [New York: Continuum, 2000], 84–99).

3. See the massive data-driven reimagination and reevaluation of the "fall of Rome" and European history by a historian of the late Roman period, Walter Scheidel, in his *Escape from Rome: The Failure of Empire and the Road to Prosperity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019). Its anchor in contemporary discussions about socio-economic development in diverse regions is its intent to cut off the "Why did Rome fall?" and "Is the United States another Rome?" discussions. Most imperial entities either morphed into nation states or disintegrated. Instead, Scheidel asks what was so irreducible about the Roman experience that nothing analogous ever returned (10–15). Scheidel calls on historians to be more precise in their use of counterfactual reasoning when correlating causes and historical outcomes (23–26).

4. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation*, 54, 72–74.

to use some mask of historical evidence to establish a binary of unenlightened past believers over against today's sophisticated postmodern, postcolonial, postfoundational critics.[5]

Although clearly indebted to Schüssler Fiorenza's theoretical articulation of the task facing feminist criticism, this treatment of 1 Peter will not engage in linguistic confrontation or reformation. Instead it will pursue other concerns that feminist and postcolonial scholars have brought to the surface: the presence of the nonelite and the marginalized. Consequently, rather than adopt the expression "reading against the grain," I prefer to describe the task ahead as "reading from the margins." How does a pseudonymous work that depicts a Galilean fisherman speaking in the voice and values of the cultured class sound to an audience whose social and cultural roots are closer to the fisherman than to the philosopher? The phrase "reading from the margins" also invokes the opening address, "to the exiles of the diaspora" (1:1), and the emerging field of feminist diaspora studies.[6] Does 1 Peter expect its audience to transform into a Christianized version of the elite *persona* despite the repeated references to the social scorn and the verbal and physical abuse that clearly mark their lower-class, even slave, origins? Or does that rhetoric serve as an ironic acknowledgment of dominating powers beyond their control that can enable communal solidarity?[7]

5. As Schüssler Fiorenza points out in discussing the politics of historical Jesus research, emancipatory social movements have occurred throughout Christian history. They are not a new phenomenon of modernity (*Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation*, 51). Likewise, in its attempts to reconstruct a liberationist, inclusive, womanist Jesus some feminist scholarship has built in substantial elements of anti-Jewish language. See the trenchant criticism of Christian scholarship by Amy-Jill Levine, "Theory, Apologetic, History: Reviewing Jesus' Jewish Context," *ABR* 55 (2007): 57–78.

6. This can embrace not only what Namsoon Kang refers to as "hypersensitivity to the marginalized" but also her insistence that, in a globalized world, theology should seek to move beyond the practice of cultural contextualization that emphasizes a "West" and "different from the West" binary to articulate "the interconnectivity of our destiny across the regions of the world" (*Diasporic Feminist Theology: Asia and Theopolitical Imagination* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014], 153, 249–51). For a diaspora studies approach to 1 Peter, see Shively T. J. Smith, *Strangers to Family: Diaspora and 1 Peter's Invention of God's Household* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016).

7. Such is the case with the young African American slave serving the white Virginia plantation owner who fathered him but then sold off his mother in the novel by Ta-Nehisi Coates, *The Water Dancer* (New York: Random House, 2019). The protagonist, Hiram, encapsulates the complex web of values by which that class of Virginian families saw themselves as superior to both lower-class white Virginians and their slaves by referring to them as "the Quality."

1 Peter 1:1-12

Letter Opening

The formal elements in ancient letter-writing begin with a designation of the sender and recipients, followed by some expression of the author's wish or prayer that the recipients are doing well. Paul's letters can expand both his own identification as an apostle and the "health wish" into a much longer prayer report that opens either with thanksgiving or with blessing (Rom 1:1-15; 2 Cor 1:1-7).

The Greeting (1:1-2)

This opening employs a triadic pattern indicating that the correspondents share a faith in the threefold divine power: God the Father, who has chosen believers; the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies them; Jesus Christ, who died to redeem them. "Sprinkled with his blood" reminds the audience of familiar ritual actions in which the blood of a sacrificial animal was thought to purify or cleanse participants.

Galilean Fisherman or Learned Apostle?

How does the anonymous author of this epistle shape the communal memory of Peter as "apostle of Jesus Christ"? The letter does not permit one to determine whether or not its audience would have been familiar with the figure depicted in the canonical Gospels. By the mid-third

The Roman Empire

APPROXIMATE EXTENT OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE AT THE TIME OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

0 400 Miles

0 400 Kilometers

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1 Pet 1:1-2

[1:1]Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, [2]who have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood:

May grace and peace be yours in abundance.

century CE, 1 Peter's peculiar opening list of Roman provinces, "Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1:1), was presumed to indicate areas in which the apostle Peter himself had established churches among Jews living in the region (so Origen, cited in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.1.2). The sophisticated use of citations and allusions to the Greek version of the Old Testament (OT) and even to its linguistic phrasing, which modern scholars consider a mark against Petrine authorship, might have seemed quite different to early Christians. Catalogues of the Old Testament text segments or combinations indicate familiarity with the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy), Prophets (Isaiah, Hosea, Ezekiel, Malachi), and Writings (Psalms, Proverbs, Job) and, as one might anticipate from their usage across the New Testament (NT), Isaiah, Psalms, and Proverbs predominate.[1] Where a modern historical critic might see the development of Christian traditions quite beyond the range of the Galilean fisherman, 1 Peter's Greek-speaking audience would hear a learned Jew confirming a message that their existence was already envisaged by the prophets (1 Pet 1:10-12).

In the ancient world in which speech reflecting masculinity, rhetorical skill, and mastery of a received literary canon designated both gender and status[2] the linguistic skill evident in 1 Peter's use of Greek[3] tells any listener that its author is an educated male whose family must have been of some prominence, not the unschooled Aramaic speaker scorned by elders and scribes in Acts 4:13.[4] Despite its author's familiarity with the Greek of classical texts, citations and allusions in 1 Peter never venture

1. John H. Elliott, *1 Peter*, AB 37B (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 15–19.

2. Mary Beard, *Women and Power: A Manifesto* (New York: Liveright, 2017), 17.

3. Elliott, *1 Peter*, 41–82.

4. Ibid., 120. Following the usual practice of ancient historians in composing speeches for their subjects, Luke provides eloquent words for the apostle. Readers of Acts could recognize the Holy Spirit working through these men whose lack of education and economic status would have denied them any hearing before this court.

outside the Christian language game, with a diverse range of early Christian traditions and phrases complementing its richly textured use of the OT. This combination of an educated Greek style that could have been acquired only through a disciplined education based on classical sources with a textual tradition grounded in the Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures is an appropriate vehicle for the figure whom Paul acknowledged as "apostle to the circumcised" on the same basis that he himself had been called by God to evangelize the Gentiles (Gal 2:8-9). The authority of this Peter is, however, not restricted to those of Jewish descent. The audience projected in this letter has taken on the identity of God's chosen, immediately upon their incorporation into the Christian association through baptism.

Addressees?

However, this greeting also presents us with another puzzle concerning the address. The area in which the letter's addressees are scattered covers part of northwestern Asia Minor including ports on the Black Sea.[5] Officially the territory included three Roman provinces, Bithynia and Pontus having been united into a single administrative unit in the first century BCE. Furthermore, the addressees apparently do not belong where they are living. The word "Dispersion" translates the Greek term διασπορά (*diaspora*), usually found in the Bible and Jewish sources for Jews scattered from their homeland. Today we have academic departments of African and Diaspora Studies that use the word in a broader sense for ethnic groups that have settled outside their homelands. Though we might imagine an apostle Peter writing from Jerusalem to Christian Jews in Asia Minor as an apostle to others scattered in the cities of Asia Minor, "diaspora" as a reference to Judeans scattered outside their homeland does not fit the recipients described in the rest of the letter.[6] The majority population did not know God or his commandments but followed the immoral lifestyle of pagans.

5. See the maps in ibid., 85, 92.

6. First Peter slips between the audience's past as immoral pagans and its incorporation into the people of God as Israel (see Lutz Doering, "Gottes Volk: Die Adressaten als 'Israel' im Ersten Petrusbrief," in *Bedrängnis und Identität: Studien zu Situation, Kommunikation und Theologie des 1. Petrusbriefes*, ed. D. S. du Toit, BZNW 200 [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013], 81–113).

And what of the term "exiles"? The Greek word παρεπιδήμος refers to a person who has either willingly or by judicial sentence been forced to leave her or his homeland. Usually "exile" is for a limited period, unlike the situation of persons who by choice or force (enslavement) become permanent residents in a place where they are not citizens. Those taken as slaves in war were considered to have lost their ethnic identity permanently. Even though they might later be freed, they no longer belonged to a "people" or "nation."

Blessing Formula (1:3-5)

This blessing formula repeats the triadic pattern of God the Father as the source of the salvation believers experience, the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the foundation of their hope, and the power of God (the Spirit) protecting them while believers wait for their inheritance. The ritual action corresponding to a new birth must be baptism.

This formula speaks even more powerfully to individuals who live with the difficulties of being exiled: noncitizens or, worse, slaves or former slaves who have been stripped of any homeland. New birth means a new identity, with an inheritance that cannot be torn away from them. We are all too familiar with the struggles of refugees who once were respected professionals in their home countries but are forced to take menial jobs in a new land simply in order to survive. Without the resilience of hope for a better future they could not keep going.

Expanded Formula: Rejoicing while Suffering (1:6-12)

What the language of dispersion and exile only hinted at in the opening formulae now comes center stage: the suffering that believers are experiencing. Suffering, both theirs and the model provided by that of Christ, is a leitmotif in 1 Peter.[7] From the perspective of feminist critical theory the religious justification for enduring unjust persecution and suffering now as the prelude to heavenly glory, attached to the death and resurrection of Jesus, is problematic. Social workers recognize that abuse victims often internalize an abuser's voice, which blames the victim for

7. Steven Richard Bechtler, *Following in His Steps: Suffering, Community and Christology in 1 Peter*, SBLDS 162 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998); Gruden Guttenberger, *Passio Christiana: Die alltagsmartyrologische Position des Ersten Petrusbriefs*, SBS 223 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2010).

1 Pet 1:3-12

[3]Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, [4]and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, [5]who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

[6]In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, [7]so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. [8]Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an

provoking the violence inflicted.[8] The hierarchical distribution of status and power in first-century Roman society was played out physically on the bodies of women in general and of noncitizen immigrants and slaves (women and men). The distinctions between "good" and "cruel" masters makes little difference in a social context that presumes slaves are to be beaten.[9] First Peter proposes that readers make an exchange between their beaten bodies and that of Christ crucified, "by his wounds you have been healed" (1 Pet 2:24). That logic anticipates that the abused wife or slave can submerge present pain in the anticipation of sharing the glory of Jesus's resurrected body.[10]

This correlation between undeserved, abusive suffering that Peter's audience experiences routinely and that of Christ as a prelude to glory has been characterized as the ethical core of the letter.[11] As long as vic-

8. An endless cycle of repeated domestic violence within families can be fueled by this psychological internalization of guilt by its victims. See Barbara E. Reid, *Taking Up the Cross: New Testament Interpretations through Latina and Feminist Eyes* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 128–30.

9. Halvor Moxnes, "Body, Gender and Social Space: Dilemmas in Constructing Early Christian Identities," in *Identity Formation in the New Testament*, ed. Bengt Holmberg and Mikael Winninge (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 176–78.

10. Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery as a Moral Problem in the Early Church and Today* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 148–51.

11. By M. Eugene Boring in the introduction to 1 Peter for *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University, 2018). Variations on suffering as imitation of Christ run throughout (see 1 Pet 1:5-11; 2:20-21; 3:17-18; 4:1, 13-15). John H. Elliott attributes the drumbeat of suffering to the lack of secure social status experienced by an audience of immigrants who are "strangers and resident aliens" (*1 Peter*, 104–5).

indescribable and glorious joy, [9]for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

[10]Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, [11]inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory. [12]It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things that have now been announced to you through those who brought you good news by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look!

tims know themselves to be innocent, their situation is God's will. First Peter 4:13 even proposes that they can rejoice by anticipating the shouts of gladness to accompany future glory. Does this christological configuration alleviate the psychological, social, and bodily scars of random abuse? Feminist criticism answers with a resounding no. Any consolation provided the powerless against tormentors should be measured against the systemic injustice such unchallenged evil creates.[12]

This rhetorical expansion opens with a commonplace trope: suffering proves the authenticity of an individual's faith. Once faith has been tested, the glory and honor will follow when the Lord comes in judgment. Suffering is not, however, the only glitch in the system. Though the first generation of disciples and witnesses actually saw and loved Jesus, these later believers must believe without that powerful experience, and since their faith exacts a price in the various forms of suffering endured (verbal more often than physical assaults), the question "what's it worth?" must inevitably arise.

12. In a powerful critique of the racism and ethnic prejudices of Euro-American feminism, Ada María Isasi-Díaz highlights the cultural violence experienced by a minority culture (Cuban) living within another culture. Women internalize oppression in the domestic space as "our role" (*Mujerista Theology* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996], 19–25). After its conquests in the East, the city of Rome experienced unprecedented transfers of enslaved and immigrant populations from those regions. Mary Beard estimates that, beginning in the mid-second century BCE, eight thousand slaves were transported to the city every year (*SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome* [New York: Liveright, 2015], 199). Slaves lost their ethnic identity. Sellers might add an ethnic label based on observed or desirable traits. Those born as slaves had no ethnic identity at all (Sandra R. Joshel, *Slavery in the Roman World* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010], 38).

As 1 Peter unfolds it will invoke the prophets, particularly Isaiah. This section merely introduces a theoretical justification for the Christian understanding of the prophets. They were inspired by the Spirit to speak about Christ and the community that would emerge from his death and resurrection. They did not refer to events that occurred in their own time. This passage generalizes a claim made for the apostle Paul, that God's plan for the salvation of the Gentiles was revealed only in the apostle's preaching (Eph 1:8-10). Christians today often find this theological perspective troubling because it deprives Israel's prophetic heritage of any religious value apart from its adaptation to the revelation of God in Jesus Messiah.

Author's Introduction to 2 Peter

An Integrative Critical Model and Feminist Analysis

This commentary on Second Peter makes several original contributions to the literature on what is probably the final writing in the New Testament canon. Composed after the book of Revelation, 2 Peter is credibly dated to between 100 and 110 CE. My methodology is an integration of several well-honed disciplines in biblical criticism. Relying on historical-critical analysis, I consider the secular career of Pliny the Younger under Emperor Trajan and his correspondence with the emperor as contemporaneous with the struggles of the pastor-author's faith community in the provinces of northern, western, and central Asia Minor.

Along with other exegetes, I identify a number of theological controversies in the post-Pauline churches of Asia Minor, signaled by 2 Peter's polemic against dissidents. These disputes included the reaction of some Christians with a disgruntled sense of disillusion: they had concluded that the second coming of Jesus, if delayed, was merely a fiction. Others challenged the doctrine that God judges and punishes evildoers. Some Gentile-born members questioned the relevance of Jewish Scriptures to Christian faith. Others believed a secularized, relationally free lifestyle shouldn't be burdened by stodgy, outdated ethical norms for members' sexual relationships. The pastor confronted a tension between promoting unity and accepting diversity. He judged that the boundary had been breached: differences of theological interpretation, power struggles, and disputes over sexual conduct had become so fundamental and divisive that members associated with the disruptions had to be expelled. One

component of all these general areas of conflict was the gender-inclusion debate: the degree to which participation and leadership of women—and which women—could be integrated while maintaining cohesiveness in the community.

As an original approach I use rhetorical criticism of the pastor's discourse but specify the forensic references and prosecutorial tone associated with Roman courts of law. What accounts for the harsh tone of 2 Peter is that the pastor borrows the style and language of a prosecutor arguing for punishment of a criminal defendant before a judge—which explains why he borrowed language and tone from Jude. In neither letter is there the voice of a defense attorney pleading for mitigation. From a form-critical perspective I identify several literary subgenres in 2 Peter, such as an originally composed midrashic expansion on the teaching about fallen angels in Jewish tradition. In other passages allusions to Hebrew Scripture—Noah, Lot, and Balaam—depart from the original biblical narrative when the author of 2 Peter employs these references in his argument. Thus they belong to the literary genre called Jewish midrash.

This integrative critical model is undertaken within the horizon of feminist analysis. My incorporation of comments on New Testament texts by Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902) from *The Women's Bible* (1898) is an innovative and suggestive feature of this commentary on 2 Peter. It is meant to remind readers that the feminist project of reinterpreting Scripture is essentially intertwined with the larger movement in US history to secure women's human rights to equal and fair treatment in marriage, parenting, ownership of property, inheritance, the workplace, education, politics, and law. Our feminist biblical project in the Wisdom Commentary series is historically connected with women's challenge to gender norms in the first-wave US feminist movement from the mid to late 1800s. Its prominent activists include Susan B. Anthony (1820–1906), Lucretia Mott (1793–1880), and Sojourner Truth (1797–1883). This movement for equal rights was aimed not only at freeing slaves and abolishing slavery but at securing for women the right to vote and asserting their equality as persons under the US Constitution. Women were subject to ridicule, threats, and pushback at their efforts to assert a role in public and professional life. Women of color, ethnicity, and accent were and remain even more oppressed.

The Questions That Distinguish Feminist Analysis

What is feminist analysis? The purpose of this series is to undertake a rereading and reinterpretation of the biblical text from a specifically femi-

nist perspective. Feminist analysis can be undertaken by male scholars, but for this commentary I start with acknowledging that I am a woman scholar with an academic history as a theologian and member of the biblical guild.

I also have a graduate degree in comparative literature, so I pay attention to an author's intentional construction and composition in 2 Peter, which is heavily dependent on the structure and tone of a prosecutor's speech—the argument in a Roman criminal court to convince the judge of a defendant's guilt. Biblical texts are commonly read using tools of literary analysis such as genre, temporality, point of view, authorial voice and tone, plot, narrative style, imagined audience, flashback, characterization, allusion, symbol, and metaphor.

As an additional perspective I bring to this commentary a legal reading from my training and present work as a practicing attorney in family law, a secular profession supervised under California state law. I represent clients, communicate with opposing counsel, and have appeared and addressed judges in a number of courts—family, juvenile, criminal, civil, and bankruptcy.

It is through this integrative lens—Scripture, theology, literature, law—that I analyze 2 Peter with an alertness to women's presence in the text, whether explicit or implied. I pay attention to women's experiences under Roman law in the first century and the definition of crimes in the Roman legal code that would implicate women. What familiarity did women have with Greco-Roman religious traditions drawn from the colonial and cultural history of the region? What of women's social, economic, and legal subordination in both society and church in the Roman provinces of Asia Minor? Would it have made a difference in the community of 2 Peter that there were differences in women's status as Roman citizens or noncitizens, and differences based on their class, education, and even their first language as either Aramaic or Greek? I think so. How did women in the communities addressed by 2 Peter feel a sense of belonging within the church as Jewish-born, as Gentile-born, as native residents, or as immigrants to Asia Minor from the Levant?

Second Peter focuses on disruptions created by some members—which implicate women's interests, ideas, feelings, and struggles. These are implied by the pastor's condemnation of dissidents—teachers, prophets, interpreters of doctrine, and those competing for leadership. Second Peter expresses an expectation by the pastor of women's cooperative silence and adherence to a particular expression of Christian tradition and doctrine. The message from the pastor to the audience—including women who support his position—is the urgency to

disapprove and expel some female members. The objects of his purge include dissident women whose leadership, teaching, and influence threaten his own authority.

The justification for the excommunication is ostensibly the need to preserve the integrity of the gospel record and apostolic teaching about Jesus Christ, and to protect Jewish tradition from being demeaned by anti-Semitic Gentile-born members. The pastor also felt an urgency to resist the syncretizing of Christian teaching with Greco-Roman religious practices. He asserted a Jewish-Christian sexual ethic as the norm for men and for family life. He felt bound to extricate the community from compromises with sexual libertinism rife in the secular culture of the day. But despite the doctrinal and ethical justification, there runs an antifemale tone throughout, disguised by his prosecution of heretics in general, the sexually immoral in general, the false prophets in general, the economic exploiters in general, and the misleading teachers in general.

Feminist analysis assumes that 2 Peter is gender inclusive, but women as a gender are absent since they are not named and do not speak. By contrast, men are named; their words, actions, witness, and reliability are memorialized. The membership the pastor addresses includes his women allies—those loyal to the pastor as opposed to those whose presence and participation are seen as so divisive that they threaten the unity and cohesion of the community identified with "our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

Metaphor: The Man Drives a Woman in the Passenger Seat

A simple metaphor may serve to explain a feminist horizon. I am driving up a major freeway in northern California that connects Silicon Valley with San Francisco. In the lane to my right is a late-model Dodge truck, bright red, sitting high on its wheels. The driver is a man in his late sixties with dyed black hair and mustache. He is talking and gesticulating to the woman with grey permed hair in the passenger seat who is sitting silent, stone-faced, looking straight ahead through the windshield.

What are the "givens" that created this situation? Why is the man in the driver's seat and the woman not driving? What would happen if she attempted to change seats? Did she ever try? What keeps her, by either an unspoken rule or habit, taking the nondriving "place" in the car? Why is the man doing the talking, exclusively, and the woman saying nothing? When I pose these questions, I have stepped outside "the way life is," with its gender-role conventions, and into a reflective dynamic called feminist analysis.

2 Peter 1:1-2

Greeting to the Faithful, Simeon Peter as Servant

Contrast the salutation of 1 Peter, which begins simply, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ." Other Pastoral Epistles also refer to the speaker as "servant" (Jude 1; Jas 1:1), but in his self-reference as "Simeon Peter" the author of 2 Peter adopts the voice and authority of the head of the apostles and leader of the early church from its beginning. This suggests that there is an authority struggle in the community over who has ultimate decision-making power.[1]

"Simeon" also implies that the spokesperson is Jewish and invokes his tribal, patriarchal identity.[2] Simeon was the second son of Jacob by

1. "Ancient writers considered it quite permissible for a man to put out letters under the name of another, and thus to bring his own ideas before the world under the protection of an honored sponsor." Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible: A Classic Feminist Perspective* (New York: Dover, 2002), 158. (Unabridged single-volume reprint of the work originally in two volumes by The European Publishing Company, New York, in 1895 and 1898.)

2. " '*Simeon,*' Greek rendition of Hebrew '*Shim'on*' or '*Sim'on.*' This spelling, as opposed to the more common 'Simon,' appears in the NT only here and in Acts 15:14." See Michael R. Greenwald, "The Second Letter of Peter," in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 444.

2 Pet 1:1-2

[1]Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who have received a faith as precious as ours through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

[2]May grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

Leah, and his name means "Because the Lord has heard" (Gen 29:33). "Simeon" emphasizes the tribal association of Peter, his being named among the tribes of Jacob, and thus his Jewish historical roots. Identifying himself as "Simeon Peter" would be an assertion of authority to counter possible claims by Hellenistic Gentile residents of Asia Minor who identify with the ancient peoples of that region, the Myceneans, or other local tribes that inhabited the northern region around the Black Sea centuries before the area became a Roman province.[3] "Simeon Peter" invokes the foundational history of the patriarchs and matriarchs in Genesis, a lineage of fathers and mothers and children that is recorded in sacred history. This would be a claim to greater honor than a local family's invocation of their long association with the region, or anecdotal mention of their tribe by Greek geographers, or oral tradition of this or that family claiming tribal identity or occupying the region for generations under the Greek empire before it fell to Rome.

The reference to the pseudonymous author's Jewish tribal identity may serve to counter assertions of Hellenized Gentile members that they belong to a higher social class than the pastor of 2 Peter. His ancient social and religious identity can be read as a competitive assertion against rivals who claim that they should be granted more honor, privilege, and decision-making power. There are strong disputes in the community over setting criteria for membership, interpreting Paul's theology, authorizing teachers, authenticating prophetic utterances, and allocation of common funds. These internal disputes pit members against each other.

"Simeon Peter" is the pseudonym of the Jewish elder who speaks for Jewish-born loyalists and "God-fearers," Gentile adherents and converts sympathetic to Jewish ethics and tradition. "Simeon" could also be a code

3. Stanley Jonathon Storey, "Bithynia: History and Administration to the Time of Pliny the Younger" (MA thesis, University of Alberta, 1998).

name adopted by a Gentile-born elder who is upholding the Jewish-Christian tradition of Peter the apostle against disruptive Gentile-born converts in the community who dismiss Jewish tradition as irrelevant. The citations in 2 Peter of biblical and extrabiblical sources and the inclusive tone, however, suggest a speaker who shares the Jewish birth, Jewish tradition, and Jewish sensibilities of his social base of supporters who are fending off intrusions and opposition from Gentile-born members. "Simeon Peter" has greater authority to interpret Jewish-Christian religious tradition than do any Hellenistic, Gentile-born challengers. Perhaps the implication is even that he has greater authority than the Greek-named Timothy, Titus, Silas (and "Paul"?), or those with Latinate names such as Silvanus (= Silas? 1 Thess 1:1) or Urbanus (Rom 16:8).

The rhetorical posture of the speaker announces to his hearers that he sides with the Jewish-born membership even if it is a minority, because what this minority holds dear is the foundational belief of the church and the teaching of the apostles. He also asserts that he is cleaving to Jewish tradition underlying the Gospels and speaking for the church of Peter the apostle. This seems a defensive posture against an onslaught of Greek-speaking Gentile members who seem to be demeaning Jewish-origin apocalyptic scenarios, ridiculing Hebrew Scripture and legends, proposing what they may feel is a more sophisticated schema of doctrine about the spiritual life, and insisting on updating and adapting their religious practice to society in a Roman province where residents enjoy the privileges of citizenship and thus can participate in a variety of state-sponsored or state-endorsed religious activities that are also social events.

The pastor describes himself as "servant and apostle." Other writers of pastoral epistles have also adopted this humble title, notably Jude (1) and James (1:1). If this or that dissident woman attempted to adopt the title as an expression of her authority as δούλη (servant or slave)—whether in social class or working occupation, whether within the faith community's administrative functions, liturgical ministry, or service to the poor—it is Simeon Peter who is the principal slave or servant (δοῦλος), the first among δοῦλοι. The writer could then be claiming the title as a patriarchal assertion—to "out-servant" anyone else, especially a woman teacher or prophet who attempted to use a humble introduction, whether or not based on her actual social class or domestic role, to assert her own authority as "servant and apostle."

Paul's missionary journeys had taken him to Jewish communities throughout Asia Minor—Perga in Pamphylia and Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:13-51), Iconium (Acts 14:1-5, 21), Lystra and Derbe in Lycaonia

(Acts 14:1-21; 16:1-4). These communities were Hellenized and Greek-speaking; their Jewish identity and tradition were assimilated to a more heterogeneous and secular setting than the early Christian communities in the land of Israel. By naming himself "Simeon Peter" the pastor in 2 Peter seems to invoke the original Jewish identity of the first Christians in the land of Israel, the homeland of the historical Simeon Bar-Jonah.

Women's Interests in Endorsing the Name Simeon Peter

If we acknowledge the presence of supportive women in the community who sided with the pastor, why would these women, aware of the historical fiction, still endorse his adoption of the name Simeon Peter? The "Simeon" appellation would resonate with Jewish-born women in the congregation who treasured their heritage and felt their loss of former privilege and status, finding themselves reduced doubly in provincial Asia Minor to a twofold (Jewish and "Christian") ethnic and social minority.

Peter in the gospel narrative was married and had a mother-in-law healed by Jesus who served him and his disciples, a role women could identify with (Mark 1:29-31 // Matt 9:14-15 // Luke 4:38-39).[4] He is referred to by his patronymic as Simon Bar-Jonah (Matt 16:17). He was a brother to Andrew. Though we do not know the name of Peter's wife or if he and his wife had children, Peter has many more *indicia* of family relations than any of the other named followers of Jesus.[5] In fact, Peter's wife accompanied him on his missionary journeys (1 Cor 9:5).[6] This would appeal to women who were married, who themselves were mothers-in-law and who tried to promote good relations among their children and extended family members, and most certainly to women missionaries.

Peter makes a courageous affirmation of Jesus as Messiah, like Martha, who says to Jesus "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world" (John 11:27). Peter affirms "You are the Messiah" (Mark 8:29) and "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living

4. See comments on Mark 1:29-31 in Warren Carter, *Mark*, WCS 42 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2019), 27–32; on Luke 4:38-39, see Barbara E. Reid and Shelly Matthews, *Luke 1–9*, WCS 43A (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2021), 153–58.

5. Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 123.

6. Other interpretations of ἀδελφὴν γυναῖκα in 1 Cor 9:5 are possible. The expression is literally a "sister wife," rendered by NRSV as "a believing wife" and by NABRE as "a Christian wife." Some of the church fathers (e.g., Jerome, *Ad. Jovinian* 1.26; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 3.6) read this expression to mean not a wife but a woman minister who would assist with baptisms of women.

God" (Matt 16:16) and calls Jesus "the Messiah of God" (Luke 9:20). The women of the community could feel that they speak the same affirmation of Jesus Christ as Peter did.

Women might also identify with the story of the Simon Peter who denied he was a follower of Jesus when challenged (Luke 22:56-57) but then repented of his denial of the Master. Women remembering this story would feel acknowledged as truth-tellers to their pastor and have confidence that their truth-telling could effect a change of heart and shift in policy, even when they spoke to a pastor who lived long after Peter had died. Women, like the servant-girl in Luke's story of Peter's denial, recognize who the followers of Jesus are and speak the truth about their identity, even if men as august as Peter himself initially deny the accuracy of their declarations. Women in the church of Simeon Peter who remember that one of their own knew the truth and spoke the truth during the passion of Jesus feel justified in identifying true followers of Jesus and reject dissidents in the present doctrinal crisis in the churches of Asia Minor.

Simeon Peter identifies himself not only as an apostle but as a servant (δοῦλος, "slave," 2 Pet 1:1). Whereas Paul, in his letters, can use δοῦλος to mean "servant" in a metaphorical sense, he uses the same word to refer to actual slaves. Δοῦλος, "servant," in a spiritual sense, as one who follows Jesus Christ, is faithful to the tradition, and lives an upright life obedient to the will of God and dedicated to Christ's mission, is almost never used in the post-Pauline epistles in that sense except in reference to the writers themselves. (At 1 Pet 2:16, "as servants of God," the Greek word is οἰκέται, "household slaves," a concept with which believers could sometimes identify, but the only other usage in 2 Peter is at 2:19: "they themselves are slaves [δοῦλοι] of corruption"—definitely not people to be imitated!)

Given that usage, "Simeon Peter's" reference to himself as a δοῦλος does not suggest he thereby identifies with believers who belong to the lowest social strata of the community—the men and women who are in fact not named or specifically identified as members of the congregation: slaves taken in military conquest and their children; bondsfolk who sold themselves—or were sold by family members—into servitude to pay a debt; indentured workers who are seasonal laborers; those who perform menial household tasks or serve as day laborers, itinerant farmworkers, or tree tenders; transporters of goods on their backs from markets to homes; caretakers of goats, sheep, donkeys. Women slaves included wet-nurses, nannies, cooks and bakers, laundresses, weavers, and seamstresses. But the specific work done by the lower-class members of the community is never mentioned, nor are the workers.

As Luise Schottroff observes, "Kyriocentrism is found wherever the labor (paid or unpaid) of female and male slaves, of free women and men, is rendered invisible, wherever it serves the interests of the overlords or is described as being done by the masters themselves."[7] The author of 2 Peter is nothing if not kyriocentric.

The servants, slaves, and bondsfolk are not being honored by this usage as the bedrock members of the community. In other New Testament letters they are addressed directly, being told to "obey your masters" (in Ephesians, Colossians, the Pastorals, and 1 Peter). Here they are simply invisible.

7. Luise Schottroff, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters: A Feminist Social History of Early Christianity*, trans. Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 35.

Author's Introduction to Jude

Attending to a Different Voice

Introduction

So far as most readers are concerned, the title of Thomas Hardy's novel *Jude the Obscure* would sum up not only the author of the biblical Letter of Jude but also the work itself. Even those aware of its existence would probably have a hard time finding it, nestled as it is between the Third Letter of John (which is itself surely not a major part of anyone's functional New Testament canon) and the book of Revelation. Nor would ordinary churchgoing people become acquainted with the Letter of Jude through hearing it read or preached about at the liturgy, where it scarcely features. In the Roman Catholic lectionary, seven of its twenty-five verses are read at Mass every other year, on the Saturday of Week 8 in Year 2 (unless seasonal readings take precedence, as in 2014). Even those who pray the whole of the daily Liturgy of the Hours encounter it only once more each year: an expurgated version, verses 1-8, 12-13, and 17-25, constitutes the first reading in the Office of Readings for the Saturday of Week 34, the very last day of the church's year.[1]

The brevity of the work, combined with a problem of name recognition, is another cause of its being very easily overlooked. Admittedly, Paul's brief missive to Philemon likewise consists of only twenty-five verses and

1. It does not appear at all in the *Revised Common Lectionary* or in the Daily Lectionary of the *Book of Common Prayer*.

is about a third shorter than Jude if we count words rather than verses, yet Philemon is part of the extensive corpus of Paul's writings, so most readers have at least some sense of who Paul is and what he stands for. By contrast, the Letter of Jude stands alone as a New Testament book and its author is not the "Saint Jude" of popular piety (see n. 3 below).

The Greek name Ἰούδας is relatively common in the New Testament, occurring some forty-four times.[2] Ten of the occurrences, denoting the Hebrew patriarch or the land or tribe that bears his name, are translated by the NRSV as "Judah" (e.g., Matt 1:2; 2:6; Heb 8:8; Rev 5:5), as is another less remote ancestor of Jesus who is named in Luke 3:30, and five more people who feature in the New Testament have the name Ἰούδας: a brother of Jesus, a disciple of his,[3] a Galilean rebel, a householder in Tarsus, and an apostle and prophet named in Acts 15. All of these, however, are called "Judas" by the NRSV, as is, of course, the other bearer of that name, whose notoriety ensures that scarcely anybody could fail to know about him: Judas Iscariot, whom the Gospels and Acts mention by name twenty-two times. Interestingly, the fact that the writer of the Letter of Jude shared the Greek form of his name with, among others, the one who handed Jesus over did not prevent the inclusion of the work in the New Testament canon, where its place seems to have been relatively secure despite occasional misgivings.[4] In our own day the use

2. In the NT period the name was popular mainly because of Judas Maccabeus, a major hero in Israel's struggle for independence from Syria around 164 BCE. Richard J. Bauckham writes that nearly all the most frequently used names among Jews living in the land at the time, male and female, were those of the Hasmonaean family, to which Judas Maccabeus belonged. See *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 67–92, including the chart on p. 75, where Jude/Judas ranks fourth among the names given to boys. The names of Judas and his family carried nationalistic hopes of deliverance by God (p. 77). Note that English is unusual in having two forms of the name (Judas and Jude), in addition to Judah.

3. Luke names this disciple Judas son of James (6:16 and Acts 1:13). In Mark (3:18) and Matthew (10:3) he is not called Judas, but Thaddaeus (which some manuscripts of Matthew replace or supplement with the otherwise unattested Lebbaeus). In popular Catholic piety this individual, sometimes referred to as Judas (or Jude) Thaddaeus, became "Saint Jude," the patron saint of hopeless causes. For a detailed account of this phenomenon in the twentieth-century United States, particularly as a resource used by women, see Robert A. Orsi, *Thank You, Saint Jude: Women's Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

4. Martin Luther, for example, was dubious about including Jude in the canon. Although Athanasius lists Jude among the New Testament books in his Festal Letter of 367, for some earlier writers Jude's place in the canon was "disputed" (Eusebius, *History* 13–14), and the Syrian church regarded it as noncanonical until the sixth

of "Jude" rather than "Judas" for the title of the work in English translations could, somewhat perversely, work to the writer's disadvantage: something known as "the letter of Judas" might attract more attention than the work currently does, as we attempt to retrieve the witness of those whom the mainstream has disregarded or vilified.[5]

TRANSLATION MATTERS

Why do English Bibles translate Ἰούδας in four different ways: Judah, Judas, Juda, or Jude? Mechanically speaking, the "correct" translation of the Greek name is "Judas," since that is simply a transliteration: each Greek letter is replaced by its Roman alphabet equivalent. But when New Testament writers are referring to the patriarch, the son of Jacob and Leah, or to the tribe or land named after him, they are using a Greek word that corresponds to the Hebrew יהודה (*y^e^hudah*). In these cases translating the Greek as "Judah" (or, in some older translations such as the Authorized Version [KJV], Juda) draws attention to the Hebrew original and ensures that English readers are alerted to the foundational nature of what is being denoted. "Judah" also serves to distinguish the patriarch, tribe, and land from the many later bearers of the name about whom we know, whose literary context is the Greek-speaking world that resulted from the conquest of the region by Alexander the Great after 333 BCE and its consolidation under his various successors. (First Maccabees, which includes the exploits of Judas Maccabeus, was written in Hebrew but has come down to us only in the Greek version.)

When the patriarch and his immediate legacy are not being designated, the decision to use "Jude" or "Judas" depends on the editor, the former being one way of avoiding the latter, at least in English. (Most European languages do not have the equivalent of "Jude.")

For Christians the big problem with "Judas" has been its association with Judas Iscariot. When the New Testament names someone else called Ἰούδας the context always makes it clear that Judas Iscariot is not the one involved: for example, as part of a list of Jesus's brothers (Mark 6:3), "Judas son of James" (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13), "Judas the Galilean" (Acts 5:37), and even "Judas (not Iscariot)" (John 14:22). Most contemporary English translations refer to all such individuals as "Judas." The exception is Jude 1:1. Here "Jude," not "Judas," occurs in all current versions, a usage dating from the sixteenth century when the Bible gradually became available to ordinary people in English: the earliest translation, William Tyndale's, published in 1526, has "Iudas" at Jude 1:1, but "Jude" became the usual translation, with some versions having it also elsewhere, e.g., in the Douai-Rheims version to denote the other apostle called Ἰούδας in Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13.

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century. See, e.g., J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, BNTC (London: A & C Black, 1969), 223–24.

5. Consider the brief sensation produced by the publication of the newly discovered second-century "Gospel of Judas" in 2006.

TRANSLATION MATTERS (cont.)

That Christians associated Ἰούδας with Judas Iscariot caused a very different and much worse problem for Jewish people, victimized over centuries because their collective name, derived from that of the patriarch, could be used as a pretext for Christian hatred and persecution.

Note that the feminine form of the name is Judith, although Jude was also used for girls between the sixteenth and the mid-nineteenth centuries in England.

The Letter of Jude is thus not directly linked with any other parts of the New Testament and, like the other letters included there, represents only one side of the correspondence. Reading one half of other people's exchanges is often a frustrating exercise. Moreover, bafflement or misunderstanding is more likely when the text is an ancient one, and because Jude is one of the books of the Bible, many Christians are understandably offended by the author's passionate attack on the unnamed people who live among those to whom the letter is sent. The consensus he seeks involves the implied claim (at least in vv. 4-7, 10-11) that the "infiltrators" against whom he writes are doomed to destruction by God unless, perhaps, they are led to change their ways (vv. 22-23).

We do not know how the immediate recipients of the letter responded to it. Feminists and many other modern readers will reject the idea that Jude's approach is an effective way to build authentic community in any age. The events of twentieth-century European history and the actions of long-serving leaders in some countries demonstrate only too clearly the immediate and ongoing disastrous outcomes when groups of people hand over too much personal responsibility to a strong leader. We are aware, too, that the burden of the resulting oppression is borne disproportionately by those who are in some way disadvantaged within societal structures: women, the disabled, and others whose face, sexual orientation, social class, or viewpoint "does not fit" for whatever reason. As Eloise Rosenblatt has observed, "Tragic consequences for ecumenical and interfaith relations have followed from Christians' failure to properly historicize, limit, and even reject this sort of bombastic invective against those who fell into the category of 'the rival' or 'the other.'"[6]

6. See Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt, "Jude," in *Searching the Scriptures*, vol. 2: *A Feminist Commentary*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 392–98, at 397.

Jude 1-2

Who I Am and Who You Are

We described above the broad terms of the writer's introduction of himself. Feminist readers will note the presumed male bias of the writer's self-designation. In Jude's world as in later times no kudos can accrue from parading one's family connections to named women, even if in this case the woman concerned might well have been called Mary and destined to have high name recognition in later centuries.

Like Paul and the other New Testament letter writers, Jude goes on to address his hearers by reminding them of their special status. He does so under three headings. They are, primarily, people who have been specially called (by God), which sets them in the company of many figures from the Hebrew Scriptures and also their fellow Christians: see, for example, Romans 1:6-7; 8:28, 30; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 9. Second, they are God's beloved (as in, e.g., Deut 7:7-8; Hos 11:1; Rom 1:7; Eph 5:1; see also Jude 21). Third, they are being kept safe, τετηρημένοις, for Jesus Christ, the verb here recurring in the same sense at the end of the letter in verse 21, with a related idea using a different verb in verse 24. These three aspects characterize their past, their present, and their secure future.

The writer's wish for them is also expressed in typically biblical language: that they might have an abundance of mercy, peace, and (echoing the verb ἠγαπημένοις in v. 1) love. These come from God, but the first (understood as making the most positive and accepting judgment possible in light of knowing the full circumstances of another's actions) is

Jude 1-2

[1]Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James,

To those who are called, who are beloved in God the Father and kept safe for Jesus Christ:

[2]May mercy, peace, and love be yours in abundance.

also an attribute the writer expects the community to display: at the end of the letter, in verse 22, mercy reappears as something the readers are to offer to those who need it. Love, too, is noted as part of the community life in the form of their "love-feasts" (v. 12), while in the final section the members are urged to keep themselves in God's love (v. 21). So mercy and love enclose the letter as a whole, reflecting the situation of the community members as the writer would have them understand it. They are also "beloved" of the writer: the next section opens with this address (v. 3), which is repeated emphatically ("but you, beloved") in verses 17 and 20 as the writer turns from telling them exactly what he thinks about the infiltrators to directly addressing the community as such.

The address lacks any distinctions among those to whom it is sent, but the writer could reasonably have expected that even people of lower status in the community (including enslaved persons and free women) could feel consoled and encouraged by this expression of their value to God and to the writer of the letter. Unfortunately, this would not change their status as such: it took nearly two millennia for enslaving others to be recognized as a practice that is incompatible with being a follower of Jesus, and the situation as regards women's equality with men is still very much unfinished business. Yet both groups were included in the community and implicitly addressed in this letter. One could even say that by presenting himself as a "slave" of Jesus the writer is relativizing slavery: it all depended on who the master was.

TRANSLATION MATTERS

"Love" in the New Testament usually translates ἀγάπη (*agapē*) or one of its cognates. Ἀγάπη denotes affection, a warm concern for the other, cherishing. Words of this group are clearly distinct from ἔρως (*erōs*), sexual love or desire, which is not used in the New Testament, but they are occasionally equivalent to φιλία (*filia*), friendship, the love of close association. The noun φιλία occurs in the NT as a noun only in James 4:4. The verb, by contrast, is used twenty-five times, about half of them in the Fourth Gospel and equivalent to the verbal ἀγαπεῖν. In the Synoptic Gospels words of the φιλία group have a negative sense, indicating mistaken priorities (Matt 6:5; Luke 20:46) and the kiss that Judas gives or offers to Jesus (Mark 14:44 and parallels).

Love, ἀγάπη, in Jude can be seen as a kind of matrix that holds things together at different levels. The primary bonding is the love God has for the community, comparable with God's love for Israel (see Deut 7:8 and Hos 11:1). It is a kind of force field in which they live and in which they should keep themselves (v. 20). Although in that verse "the love of God" means God's love for them, in the nature of the case it also implies the need for a loving response—to God in the first place but among themselves and with the writer as well. This is the context of the writer's wish that they may have love (v. 2) and of his calling them beloved (vv. 3, 17, 20), a term that does, however, carry hints of paternalism because of its use in Greek literature and in Scripture to designate a favored or only son (see, e.g., Gen 22:2, 12). The "love-feasts" (v. 12) are also supposed to be an occasion for community members to bond with each other, as well as strengthening their commitment to remaining in God's love.

Jude 3-4

A Pastor's Concern about a Dangerous Situation

Two main things are clarified in this section: first, the writer's intentions, in which context he also indicates his relationship to the community, and second, his perception of the situation to which he is responding. Together they explain the existence of the letter and the rest of its contents.

Verse 3: A Pastoral Document Addressed to Everyone, Regardless of Status, Gender, or Function in the Community

From the outset the writer demonstrates his pastoral concern for the community, a concern that evidently preexisted the crisis that prompted the letter. He had been intending to write to them anyway and was eager to do so (v. 3). The topic of the unwritten letter would have been "the salvation we share." This surely would have been a very different document: an invitation to everyone to celebrate the state in which he and they had found themselves as called, beloved, and kept safe for Jesus Christ (v. 1) and for the eternal life (v. 21) that is the ultimate horizon of Christian understanding. A further hint of the essentially (and perhaps surprisingly) upbeat mood of the writer appears at the end of verse 24, where "rejoicing" is to be the end result of their being in God's glorious presence.

Jude 3-4

[3]Beloved, while eagerly preparing to write to you about the salvation we share, I find it necessary to write and appeal to you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. [4]For certain intruders have stolen in among you, people who long ago were designated for this condemnation as ungodly, who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Verse 3 also reinforces Jude's self-introduction in verse 1, which is compatible with a sense of the basic equality between Jude and his addressees, at least as regards the salvation they share: although he is a slave of Jesus (v. 1), the salvation (understood as transcendent deliverance by God from anything that would prevent their ultimate fulfillment) is common to them, and the community is addressed as a whole. Admittedly, he is writing to them in an authoritative way: he is instructing them, not the reverse. On the other hand, he does not mention leaders or make any reference to kinship groupings that would introduce issues of status beyond his own. Implicitly all are alike to him. Calling himself the brother of James (the only use of "brother" in the letter) could convey an assumption of status, but it is possible that Jude was simply identifying himself to his readers as a reminder that he was no relation to Iscariot. In any case, beyond the introduction he makes nothing of his family connection to James. Maybe he did not need to: his first identifying point is as one for whom *Christ Jesus* was his master in all things, a voluntary category transcending matters of family. This self-designation as Christ's slave puts him in the same category as Paul (Rom 1:1; Gal 1:10; Phil 1:1), James (1:1), and the author of 2 Peter (1:1). It identifies him as belonging to the one whom the community believed to have great power— power that came from God and was used by Jesus in healing (part of what is understood by "salvation") and in both embodying and teaching about God's active concern for those at the margins of society. It seems that Jude saw himself as continuing what God had begun in Jesus, although with a marked tendency to slip back into the kind of authoritarian approach that was and remains endemic in a patriarchal society where men are socialized to see themselves as duty-bound to control society and the people in it.

Jude's gift for the church lies in his ability to communicate: even before learning of their situation he had evidently thought he had something helpful to say to them, and the letter as a whole, although different from

his original intention, bears witness to his rhetorical skill. His change of plan causes many of the problems we have when reading the work, particularly as regards its tone, but his intentions remain pastoral and the vigorous rhetoric that follows can be understood as expressing his appreciation of the salvation that Christians share, coupled with his horror at what he interprets as a possibly fatal and apparently unrecognized risk to the community. In such circumstances he can neither proceed as he had intended nor sit back and do nothing; he finds himself constrained to enter the fray: the NRSV's translation of ἀνάγκην ἔσχον, "I find it necessary" (v. 3), scarcely does justice to the passion that drives this talented writer.

The rest of the letter is Jude's own version of doing what he is urging the community to do in verse 3: "contend for the faith." This phrase is likely to be problematic for at least two kinds of modern readers. One group will hear it as encouraging behavior that is quite unsuitable for the followers of Jesus, to the extent that it conjures up images of Crusader-like figures doing battle for a large and abstruse set of dogmatic precepts that are fixed in stone and that the evangelizers are determined to inflict on everyone else at whatever cost. Many people's understandable sensitivity to such things may have been sharpened not only by some of the more horrific events in the history of the church but also by encounters with those of the second group: contemporaries who would, to their delight, find in Jude's phrase a warrant for a militant orthodoxy that (they think) includes the right and duty to silence those of whose positions they disapprove. The first group is liable to write off the author as not representing a genuine disciple of the crucified Jesus and therefore miss engaging with his witness to the gospel. The second group, continuing to read (alas), will relish the combative tone of much of the letter but without appreciating Jude's visceral concern for the well-being of people who, like himself, are committed servants of Jesus but still very much works-in-progress and with their own integrity. It is vital that both groups realize from the outset that the first-century understanding of "contending for the faith" would have been very different from both those positions.

First, "the faith" here is simply the gospel that was "handed over" (παραδοθείσῃ, NRSV: "entrusted") to them when they became followers of Jesus.[1] Jude does not say who evangelized them, but the overlap with

1. See below on Jude 20 for evidence that for this writer "the faith" not only designates the gospel as initially received but also entails particular behavior on the part of the recipients.

the language used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1-3 makes clear that Jude is talking about how they came to be "saints": holy ones (Jude 3) who recognize their inherent dignity as human beings and the consequences of that for the way they subsequently live their lives. Paul reminded the Corinthians of "the gospel" (1 Cor 15:1) that he had received and had then "handed over" to them (v. 3, as Jude 3). It is, Paul says, a gospel in which they stand: in other words, it established their present state (1 Cor 15:2). The gospel is, furthermore, that through which the Corinthians are being saved (v. 2; compare the "salvation" in Jude 3). That the gospel ("the faith," something in which they can believe and on which they can depend) was given to Jude's readers "once for all" (v. 3) speaks to its supreme importance; here the author uses another Greek term, ἅπαξ (*hapax*), that is significant in the early church's self-understanding, particularly in the letter to the Hebrews.

Second, the Greek verb ἐπαγωνίζεσθαι ("contend") means "to contend against" others, but the primary context in which words with this root (ἀγών) are used is that of competition and, in particular, the great national games that were a significant part of ancient Greek (and, later, Greco-Roman) consciousness. These festivals included athletic, musical, and dramatic competitions and attracted participants from across Greece. Women were involved: an inscription found at Delphi names three women (Tryphosa, Hedea, and Dionysia) as winners of track events, war-chariot races, and lyre-playing competitions at various major events, including the Pythian games at Delphi, the Isthmian games at Corinth, the Nemean games at Nemea, and the Asklepian games at Epidaurus.[2] ᾿Αγών also refers to efforts and exertions in a noble cause for a wider social good. Hence the compound verb ἐπαγωνίζεσθαι in Jude 3 means "to exert intense effort on behalf of,"[3] an activity that is not restricted to those who can physically engage in battles or athletic contests; indeed, the letter to the Hebrews uses ἀγών several times to denote Jesus's saving action and its effects (e.g., 6:4; 9:26, 28; 10:2, 10). The energy implied here connects with Jude's own project, which at times seems more vigorous in its invective than polite society might appreciate but is driven by the author's passionately held convictions about what is at stake for those who have received salvation from God through "our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 4, 17, 21, 25), in light of what he

2. See Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology*, 3rd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 14.

3. BDAG, 356.

sees as the complete lack of awareness of imminent danger on the part of those directly involved. How rhetorically effective he was would have depended entirely on whether his readers were able to recognize their own situation in what he wrote.

The image that arises for me in this connection is the wild and desperate fury of a mother or father who discovers a small child happily exploring an electrical outlet with a metal probe. The hugs may come later, once the danger of electrocution has passed and Mom or Dad has calmed down somewhat, but the parent's immediate reaction is surely ἐπαγωνίζομαι (as in Jude 3), an intense exertion of effort that might well involve expressions of anger because this precious child has exposed itself to mortal risk with no sense of what the consequences might be. From the safety of hindsight the initial response may seem like overreaction, but the reality of the peril justifies it and makes it understandable. So if we can assume that Jude's analysis of the situation was accurate (which, of course, it may or may not have been), and allowing that his readers are not children but adults for whose welfare he is evidently concerned, we may find it easier to engage with his rhetoric and try to see the points he is, however intemperately, trying to make—which does not make his rhetorical outburst a model for everyday pastoral practice.

Admittedly one could argue that Jude is wrong in assuming this level of concern for those to whom he writes, and some of his readers, past and present, might reject what he writes on those grounds. Even so, the Bible is clear that, in general, responsibility within the community is not to be taken lightly: see, for example, Ezekiel 34 and Matthew 18:12-14.

A more serious objection might be that if approaches like that of Jude risk encouraging others to be intemperate on their own behalf, reading such things is not good for interpersonal relationships. Yet in a society where, increasingly, developments in electronic communication are enabling people to choose to interact only with those who think, read, vote, and live like themselves, there may be need for at least some people to commit themselves to trying to understand the position of someone whose attitudes or style they find reprehensible, on the grounds that that person might have a valid viewpoint not appreciated or recognized by society as a whole. Some of them are likely to sound like Jude.

Verse 4: A Community at Risk

Whereas in verse 3 the author addresses himself to the group as a community called by God, in verse 4 he sharpens the focus so as to draw

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